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# LIFE WITH TOPSY

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any mistakes - or inaccuracies - in it were  
probably intended to deceive the enemy.





FIRST PUBLISHED 1942

WAR ECONOMY

—

THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED IN COMPLETE  
CONFORMITY WITH THE AUTHORISED  
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*Photo Harrods Ltd*

TOPSY AND THE AUTHOR

# LIFE WITH TOPSY

BY

DENIS MACKAIL



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## CHAPTER I

1927

My first sight of Topsy was in the drawing-room at 107, Church Street, Chelsea, at about one o'clock in the afternoon of Saturday, October 22nd, in the year 1927. Diana, my wife, was waiting for me there, and it may have been that despite the fatigue and mild stupor in which I usually emerged from a morning in my study, I was aware of an expression on her face. It would have contained a mixture of triumph, mischief, and anxiety; for which last quality I was undoubtedly responsible myself. But I didn't know this yet. All I really knew at the moment was that she seemed to be pointing at the hearth-rug.

So I looked at it, and there, to my astonishment, I saw a small brown or brindled Pekingese puppy; and though I knew perfectly well what it was, I also felt that I was entitled to an explanation at once.

"What have you done?" I asked, accusingly. "Don't tell me you've been and bought it!"

She nodded. My emotions were in a considerable turmoil. For though it was true that I, also, had spotted that notice in the little shop-window in the King's Road—"Pekingese Puppies for Sale"—and though few characters have a greater weakness for this particular merchandise, at the same time I was well aware that we were equipped with a Peke already. The noble Rufus, who had first come to us seven years ago in Walpole Street—in succession to poor Porthos, who had been part of Diana's dowry—and had accompanied us to the house on Campden Hill, and thence, after our short stay there, back once more to this third house in Chelsea, was my firm and special friend. All three establishments had to a large extent revolved round him. He had been spoilt, one might say, though to Diana and myself he had always been unspoilable. Yet again, I felt—though all puppies were adorable, and Pekingese puppies were the most adorable of the lot—ought one to risk putting a snub nose out of joint at Rufus's time of life? It also undoubtedly struck me that two dogs would be a great deal more trouble and responsibility than one.

However, I think I took the first point first.

"What," I asked—still, I am afraid, rather sternly, "about Rufus? What if he doesn't like it? What if he's jealous? What if——"

It was at this moment that I noticed that Rufus—who in his own day had appeared just as surprisingly, for my wife has always believed in acting first and arguing, if necessary, afterwards—was approaching the puppy and blowing at it in a far from unfriendly manner, and that the puppy was wagging its still rather inadequate tail.

"It's a girl," said Diana. "I thought perhaps she'd be a sort of companion for him."

"Oh," I said. Rufus was a bachelor of over fifty—on the usual reckoning of seven years of a dog's life for every one of a so-called human being's—and this girl-puppy, as I could see, was a mere child. But they still seemed friendly enough, whatever complications might arise a little later on. I had to think of another objection.

"What did you pay for her?" I asked, preparing to pass on from this to a few words on extravagance. For though we were better off now than seven years ago, I hadn't forgotten that Rufus had cost fifteen guineas, and that Diana had sold a ring in order to buy him. "How much?" I insisted.

"Two pounds," said the purchaser, astonishing me again. "But she's so sweet, and she's quite a good one—I've seen both her parents, and you *must* come and see them too. And the woman said we'd never have any trouble with her, because they're all strong and they're all good-tempered in that family. And, besides," said Diana, "if you're really going to make a fuss about it—well, I explained that you might, and she's only really here on approval."

It crossed my mind—not then, but afterwards—that this was exactly what I had been told when I had come into the drawing-room at 23, Walpole Street, and first found Rufus sitting on our little sofa. At this actual moment I was secretly indignant—cunning Diana!—at the notion of any puppy being treated in this off-hand and inconsiderate manner. I was also, for some reason, on all-fours on the hearth-rug myself.

"Hullo!" I said, addressing the new arrival now, and rubbing it with one hand while I patted Rufus with the other. "You are naughty," I said, looking up at Diana. But the puppy, though it had a poor tail and curiously short hair, was decidedly attractive.

"What's it called?" I asked.

"Nothing—yet," said Diana.

This seemed to give an author more scope. Rufus had arrived from a real dog-shop already provided with a name, and though it mightn't have been the name that we should have chosen, we hadn't cared to take the liberty of changing it. But this puppy—which was now nibbling my finger—could be called anything that we liked. Good.

"I see. And how old is it?"

"Not quite four months," said Diana. "It was born on the second of July."

"I say, oughtn't its coat to be rather thicker, then? Oughtn't it to have a bit more ruff?"

"Poor darling," said Diana, referring to the puppy, of course; "it only cost two pounds." But she told me about its parents again, and about its brother—whom she described as having an imperial—and more about the pleasant if humble domestic atmosphere of the room behind the little second-hand clothes-shop, where she had just met them. Not, it appeared, that this was the actual birthplace, for they had all come here, I gathered, from an even humbler home in Clapham. A far cry, one must admit, from the Palace at Peking. I was rather touched. Yet I still felt, and indeed knew, that I had been taken unawares; and I still hadn't openly succumbed.

"Is it house-trained?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," said Diana. "Nearly four months old. Of course it is!"

As a matter of fact, this was a gross exaggeration, though she was only repeating what she had been told. Or perhaps what all puppy-sellers always allege. However, there was one last objection, or attempt to re-establish my ascendancy, as I scrambled back to my feet.

"You can't possibly have two dogs sleeping on your bed," I said. "You realize that, I suppose?"

"Of course," said Diana, again. "Of course, I thought of that long before you did. I've bought her a basket."

"Eh? Where is it?"

She produced it. It wasn't so much an ordinary dog-basket as a kind of basket-work kennel, with a high-pitched roof and a door that could be opened or kept shut. Later in that same day something caused me to fix a small flagstaff to the gable over this door, and to

attach to it a paper pennant adorned with a yellow dragon. A compliment to the Chinese, of course. A sign, also, that whatever had been said about "approval," the puppy was here for good. But of course Diana and I had both known that all along.

Here comes a bit of autobiography, and a confession. I hadn't always felt like this about puppies, even when they were Pekingese. I was brought up myself in a dogless home, and if I hadn't exactly been taught that cats were infinitely superior, I had somehow come to accept this as an aspect of truth. Now that I am older and wiser, I see no reason why one should take sides at all; but in the days of my youth—and indeed until I was technically grown-up—I had believed that dogs barked unnecessarily, that they were often rough and frequently bit, that they brought mud into the house, that they had unpleasant habits connected with street-corners and lamp-posts, and—which can still hardly be denied—that they never washed themselves, even with their own saliva. In short, during what should have been the best and brightest part of my life, I was existing in almost complete darkness; and what's more I am very much afraid that I might be there still, if I hadn't had the luck to marry Diana.

When I first got engaged to her—which was a painfully long time before our marriage was sanctioned—she had already acquired Porthos; and though no one can say that he was an easy dog, as I look back on those early days now, I can only admit that it was dashed good of her—as it still is—to put up with me at all. For she loved him. But he was always, I think, a little jealous of me, and I—scoundrel that I was—was always a little jealous of him. Of course I should like to put it all down to my upbringing, but to be quite honest I can't. There was something that I should have tried much harder to overcome, and I didn't, and I am afraid that Diana and poor Porthos both suffered from it for years.

No, I was never cruel to him; but I see now that I should have courted him also, and I never did. We put up with each other, and I did a good deal for him for Diana's sake. But we never became really intimate; to the end he was still apt to growl when I approached her, and because of my obstinacy and ignorance I could never take this as the pathetic sign of devotion that it was. Poor Porthos; he was a large Peke with a large appetite—hence his name

—and he had to go through the war years without nearly enough of the right kind of food; for it seems that innocent animals must always be punished like this. And then there was the Muzzling Order, and Pekes just won't wear muzzles—or anything else, if they don't want to—and this preyed on his spirits as well. As a matter of fact, all that happened in his case was that Diana used to take him out, holding the muzzle—which was a dachshund's muzzle, anyhow—in her hand, and instantly bending down and pretending to put it on whenever she saw a policeman. But it was a strain for both of them, and my own general attitude, I fear, was still that this was the kind of thing that came of having a dog. What a brute I must have been. But I didn't know any better. That's my only and inadequate excuse.

I remember one evening when with great difficulty and patience I coaxed him on to my lap. He wouldn't lie down there, but he sat—also patiently enough—and I stroked him, and though I still knew that his heart was all for his mistress, I did, at that moment, begin faintly to understand what she saw in him. Be silent, cynics. Of course one loves dogs because they flatter one. I'm not pretending that there was any virtue in this glimmering of the light. But, alas, that last *rapprochement* was very, very near the end.

I was working in an office then, for though I had written my first novel, no one would publish it, and as we were now trying to support a baby and nurse as well as a cook and a house-parlourmaid and ourselves, it was impossible to let this little anchor go. Presently the luck would turn, and I should actually be a professional author, with a study—recently the back dining-room—of my own. But not yet. I was still bolting breakfasts, hanging from straps in the Underground, and returning, as an exhausted wage-slave, when the tide set the other way. That was the great moment, always, and how often it has slipped into my stories. The young husband swinging into his own street at last, feeling for his latchkey, changing in some miraculous way from an underling to an overlord, and revelling already in the prospect of slippers, and companionship, and talk.

But on this evening in 1920 Diana, as I knew, was in bed with a cold. And indeed, as I look back on the years in the first little house, it seems as if one, or the other, or both of us, were always in this state. Instead, therefore, of entering the first-floor drawing-room, I mounted another flight of stairs to the little double bedroom over-

head. I opened the door, to announce my arrival and to find out how the cold was going, and saw, to my horror, that poor Diana was in tears.

At first she could hardly speak, but of course she had to tell me. Because she was ill, and because I was away at that office, Porthos had been entrusted for his afternoon outing to the care of the house-parlourmaid. She was a nice girl. She wasn't flighty, she was engaged to a policeman, and Porthos—six years old now, and sober enough in his own ways—had accompanied her in his harness, which ought to have been attached to his lead. Or certainly, at any rate, in the King's Road, however safe he might have been without it in some of the quieter side-streets.

But Alice had taken a risk, Porthos had suddenly left the pavement, and an omnibus had gone right over him at once. His back was broken, he was probably unconscious, but he had lived a few more minutes, as she picked him up and came hurrying home. This was what his stricken mistress was trying to tell me, as she choked and sobbed, and it wasn't a scene or moment that I am ever likely to forget. I wanted to comfort her, I was appalled by the suddenness and cruelty of it all, but we both knew that if Porthos had been here now, he would probably have been growling at me. And the six years that I had known him, and the three years during which we had lived under the same roof, all rose up with vision after vision of failure on my part to feel what Diana had felt.

I did my best now, but I knew that I had failed again. It was my punishment that her grief couldn't fully be shared. I dined alone downstairs, with a dark weight on my soul. I returned to find my wife still gently weeping. Poor Alice was so acutely conscious of her crime, and so miserable herself, that no one could think of blaming her. But there were sad hours, and days, and weeks, in Walpole Street, as we all kept looking round for the little creature who had gone.

He was buried in the tiny back garden, and I commissioned a carved wooden plaque which was hung on the wall above his otherwise unmarked grave. Presently it began to crack and split, and when we left it behind—at our move, about three years later, to the house on Campden Hill—the new tenants probably threw it away. After all, the real memorial was still in his mistress's heart. But by that time, in fact long before that—

Well, now we're coming to a very odd, true thing about dogs.

Personally, though my conscience was often uneasy, and I still suffered from remorse and regret, it never occurred to me that doglessness wasn't now to be our lot. We had a baby, after all. We had each other. We had plenty of occupation, for Diana was organizing all our lives, and I—having had that first novel accepted at last—was now busily writing a second one in every spare moment, and sometimes, it must be admitted, during slack moments at the office as well. Yet for her, as the weeks became months—and not so very many of them, either—the gap must have seemed more and more a gap that might be filled. She didn't tell me this—which just shows what a ruffianly sort of partner I still was—but in my mind's eye I can see her now, pausing oftener and oftener by the windows of dog-shops, tearing herself away, and then returning again. Particularly, it would seem, there was a window in Sloane Street, and there, as a red-haired, pop-eyed puppy gazed myopically out at her, she paused at length just a little too long. And suddenly went in.

But she still didn't tell me. She dragged and carried little Rufus back to Walpole Street, and she waited for her unsuspecting husband to appear. As he did, in due course, and entering the drawing-room utterly failed to notice the puppy at all. But then suddenly spotted a new leather lead.

"What on earth," he asked, in amazement, "is that doing there?"

Diana didn't answer. I looked round again. I saw Rufus. I was aghast.

"You don't mean to tell me——"

Oh, she apologized, of course. And I've already told you how she explained that he was only here on sufferance, and that if I put my foot down, the shop would take him back. It is at this point that I find myself wondering if anyone has ever put their foot down with Diana; but in any case—and though I was still aghast—I can't have done it very firmly just then. I can't quite account for what I did do. I still don't know whether the breaking of the ice was due, after all, to the vanished Porthos, or to the realization that this time there was a fair field and a clear start. It is more than possible, again, that Diana had been secretly influencing me ever since I had known her, and was at last to have her very simple reward. In any event I know that it seemed sheer brutality to me to take a puppy from a shop-window, to bring it into a house like mine, and then to

send it back again. I think I said so, as I got down on the floor.

So that's how I became a dog-lover, or at any rate a Peke-lover, and at last saw the light. Little Rufus, who was also said to be house-trained, almost immediately began making messes all over the premises, and particularly, I am afraid, in the nursery, owing to the fact that he was still so young that he could only go upstairs, and hadn't yet learnt to come down. I can't say that Nannie appreciated this, but I skipped after him with dusters and dust-pans, and brought him down, and let him out in the garden—much too late, but that's how one trains them—and dried his little feet with a towel when he came in. Once more a dog was sleeping or snoring on Diana's bed, but it didn't growl at me, because I was treating it in the right way.

Presently it would be sleeping or snoring in the little back dining-room as I did my work, and I complained when Diana came to take it out, because I said that it was giving me inspiration. As it did, for Rufus, of course, is the dog in *Greenery Street*, which I wrote in the house on Campden Hill, in case I should forget all the joys and sorrows in the house that a second baby had eventually made us leave. He was never my own dog, though I always laid claim to half of him, for it was Diana who had bought him, and it was with Diana, if ever we separated on our walks, that he would always trot off. But I did love him, I did rely on him, and we did understand each other from beginning to end. One of my earliest acts was to take him to be photographed—for some reason right across the Park to Oxford Street—and he was put on an ugly little table, under a fierce light, and looked frightened; as he still does in the fading portrait in its standing frame. But he was a noble boy, for all that, and if I close my eyes—which is really better than looking at any photograph—I can still see him lying with his head between his front paws, and his hind legs stretched straight out behind him in a manner invented and patented by Pekes.

Dear Rufus. And how kind you were to Topsy, almost from the beginning. Now we must go back, or on, to 1927 again, and to the ground floor of the house in Church Street, and through the hall, and past the staircase, into the dining-room that looks out on the backs of the houses in Carlyle Square. Named, of course, after Thomas Carlyle.

Topsy's first meal with us; and with Mary, I expect, for the elder



baby was now more than eight and a half, though Anne, the younger one, was probably still having lunch with another Nannie upstairs. I can't pretend that I remember the details, or how soon it was before the two dogs settled down to the arrangement by which each ate its own meal in its own place, and then rushed over to lick the other one's empty dish. We didn't do this sort of thing at the table, of course, but it became a canine ritual almost at once. Only on the very rarest occasions would either of them find anything but an already well-polished surface, but hope had started it, and custom carried on. Gobble-gobble-gobble. Change places. Lick-lick-lick. And then another of the high-spots of the day was over, as the human beings still took their own curiously leisurely time.

After lunch, no doubt, when we had all had our bit of chocolate, Topsy would have been introduced to the other ritual of the Block. Of the outing, in other words, along Mallord Street, up the Vale, back by Mulberry Walk, and so into Church Street again. There were spots on this circuit where dogs had to be hurried or even slightly chevied, for not all our neighbours appreciated the object that was in mind. There had been shouts from open windows, and unfortunate encounters with neighbours just leaving or entering their own doors. But of course we knew the danger-spots, and there were plenty of others, where the neighbours kept dogs themselves, at which we could all pause as long as we liked. Later—and not so very much later—when she was completely trained, I can remember Topsy contentedly snuffing at the pepper with which one householder had tried to defend his door-step. Not that we encouraged her to do this, or weren't doing our utmost to urge her into the gutter. But it's no use pretending that Pekes follow any rules or instructions but their own.

On that first night, for instance, the new puppy was given its last chance in the little garden, and carried upstairs, and put in its basket-work kennel—with the pennant now flying on top—while Rufus took his old place on Diana's bed. The next thing, of course, was that the puppy came out again, and after it had done this several times we decided to shut its door. It was quiet then, on its crochet-work bedding. There seemed reasonable hope that it had accepted the situation, and was already fast asleep.

So I crept into bed myself. I read for a bit, as I always did. And presently I turned the light off.

"She seems all right so far," I whispered in the darkness.

The puppy immediately began to whimper.

"Don't take any notice," said Diana, equally confidentially.

I didn't. Or at least I tried to convey this impression. But the whimpering continued, and it was a strain both on my patience and my kind heart.

"Perhaps," I said presently, "I'd better just have *one* look, to see if she's all right."

I switched the light on again, and got up. The whimpering stopped instantly. I thought that perhaps if I brought the kennel a little nearer, the puppy might feel less imprisoned and remote. So I picked it up gently. And there was a small pool on the parquet floor.

"Oh, lord!" I said. "Ought I to change her bedclothes?"

I changed them. I spoke kindly and firmly to the puppy, shut her in again, got back into bed myself, and once more turned off the light. The puppy started whimpering.

And so on. I shouldn't like to say how often this procedure was repeated, and I am the first to admit that Diana almost certainly got out of bed much oftener than I did. But it was a disturbed and monotonous sort of night; it was duplicated, in almost exactly the same manner, on the Sunday, and it may even have been on the Monday. By the Tuesday, I should say, the puppy had won. In the matter of pools it was certainly improving, but it saw no reason why it should be shut into a basket-work kennel, while Rufus snored happily on a bed. It made this perfectly clear, and the truth was, of course, that Diana had been longing to have it there all the time. So it was put there, and remained there—though the bed wasn't always the same one—for the best part of the next twelve years. As it grew larger, and could jump down without help, it tended—like Rufus—to spend parts of the night on the little sofa or the floor. But it always started and ended on the bed, and in cold weather—for this there was a reason—it would pick at the top of the bed-clothes until it had snuggled down inside.

All wrong, of course, if you don't happen to love Pekes. But this Peke, you see, wasn't only gentle and affectionate—as anyone should surely be able to tell at once from its engaging and good-natured expression—but, to come to the point and give that reason, never developed a real Peke's coat.

I had been quite right to draw attention to its thinness, and Diana

had been quite mistaken—not that either of us cared twopence—in telling me that it would soon grow. It didn't. Its texture was of the purest silk—there has never been a Peke with smoother or softer hair. But its ruff was always a poor one, its tail, in comparison with other Pekes, was always scanty, its small feet were adorned by no "feathers," and though presently its ears became long and handsome, its suit, as you might say, always remained of this distinctive cut. So it felt the cold, poor little thing, and used to warm itself by sitting with its front legs over the curb of the drawing-room fire—but with its eyes shut and its head turned upwards so that all the warmth should reach its chest. And if it wanted to get under the bed-clothes when it was cold at night, why shouldn't it? No reason at all, in its mistress's opinion. So it did. And I dare say the only reason why Rufus had never done this was that, with his own thick coat, he suffered just as much from the heat. A hot summer was torment to him. He took real pleasure—which I certainly don't—in snow. But poor little Topsy, who never grew as big as he did, either, would bask or get into a warm corner whenever she had the chance.

More memories of that first week. The two dogs settling down together. The discovery that nothing would induce the new puppy to collaborate with the authorities by wearing either harness or—which in any case is rather a disgrace for a Peke—a collar. She was given both, and a lead as well, and in stringent emergencies—as, for instance, when travelling by train—she was sometimes forced to wear one or the other, at any rate while under official eyes. But as for walking a yard in them—no. All four feet appeared to cling to the pavement, and unless she were to be strangled, one had to give in. So one did; and she remained a Pekingese nudist. There was never really the slightest hope of budging her from that.

Another memory. Of a conducted visit—without the dogs, though—to the puppy's parents and brother in their back parlour. Indeed it was a very unassuming establishment—if one had called it a rag-and-bone shop, one could hardly have been sued for slander; a little two-storey building in a terrace afterwards pulled down to make way for the Chelsea Gaumont Cinema. Diana and I went through into the more private quarters, and I must say that there was something rather charming about the domestic scene. For it is rare, in dog-land, for parents to live together; but there was the father as well as the mother—not to mention their son with the imperial, who

had now also, we were informed, made arrangements to enter a Chelsea home. A delightful family. They looked pretty good Pekes, too; so that again I had hopes about our own puppy's coat. The woman who owned them again spoke highly of their characters, and this time provided us with a pedigree—which wasn't as long as Rufus's, but was perfectly convincing to anyone who wanted to be convinced.

As we did, of course. And what's more, we would both go to the stake to indicate our conviction that nothing but Pekingese blood flowed in our own puppy's veins. A policeman at Waterloo Station once took it for a monkey—extraordinarily ignorant men they sometimes seem to have in the Force—but though its coat was poor, its lineage was true. There was no trace, I must again assure you, of any other conceivable breed. So we took the document reverently, and left the little family, and never, to our positive knowledge, saw any of them again. But that's all right in dog-land. If the puppy had a surname at all now, of course it was the same as mine.

As for its other name, that was still undecided, and wasn't apparently to be hurried. As a matter of fact, I have never found this job very easy, and should probably have written even more short stories than I have—though I seem to have written nearly three hundred to date—but for the number of mornings when I have clutched my brow, or have risen and paced my study floor, because I couldn't think what on earth another hero and heroine were to be called. So in the case of the puppy, though there was every female name in the world to choose from, I can't say that the author was very much help. I thought of Ruby, because it sounded like a companion to Rufus, and tried this for a bit, but of course it was an absurd name for a dog that wasn't red. And then I thought of Magnolia—I got this idea from a gramophone-record that we were playing a good deal at the time—but of course it was hardly the name for a dog that wasn't white. I made other suggestions, but without conviction, and certainly without convincing Diana that the right solution had been found.

"No," she kept on saying. "I don't think that's quite it. No, I don't think you've *quite* got it."

I hadn't. But she had still suggested nothing herself.

"Come on," I said challengingly. "It's your turn. We can't wait for ever, you know."

"Topsy'," said Diana suddenly.

"Oh no," I protested, with extraordinary folly. "I mean, why? Dash it, she isn't a negress. She's either Chinese or English. Surely!"

She had a black face, though. Admittedly there is something negroid about the shape of a Peke's head. Topsy? Well, why should there be a reason, after all? Diana was now trying to explain that the name suggested the extreme unpretentiousness of our two-pound puppy's position and character. It was certainly a friendly name. And a good name for calling out, too—not that Pekes often come when they are called. I knew, in fact—though I still had to resist, because of my professional pride—that it was the author's wife, and not the author, who had discovered the answer at last. Topsy. Just like that. Whatever it meant, and whatever other associations it might ever have had. I tried it aloud, and the puppy waved its tail.

"All right," I said, a little grudgingly, because of my own failure. "It's Topsy, then. Is it?"

"Yes," said Diana, with no hesitation at all. And Topsy it henceforth was.

That was settled, then; in not more, I suppose, than a week or ten days. And of course as soon as a puppy has a name of its own, a new link is forged. She was one of the family now. The youngest, and at moments, it must be admitted, the favourite. But we never really forgot Rufus's snub nose. If there were two dogs now, he was the head dog. We told him this, and he hid his jealousy; while Topsy herself was the last, from beginning to end, who could conceivably have presumed. She was gay, and playful, but she never had an ounce of conceit. One couldn't spoil her, though we tried all her life. She certainly wasn't servile. It wasn't in her to fawn. But she knew, in her sleek little head, that she was the second of two dogs, and had no sort of ambition to be anything else. She knew that she was loved, and that was enough for her. The situation in which she found herself was accepted without criticism or question. She was an enviable and admirable girl.

Now, of course, it was her turn to be photographed, but she wasn't taken to Oxford Street. Diana took her to a much more modest establishment, again in the King's Road; she was put on a kind of piano-stool—not the revolving sort, but the sort with a woven wicker seat—and there was nothing in the resulting portrait to show that

she was the least alarmed. She is sitting sideways, with her face towards the camera, looking cheerful and obliging. An adolescent already, rather than a real puppy, yet with no school-girl lumpishness, but the neat, slim figure that she kept to the end. "Here I am," she seems to be saying. "I'm not quite sure that I understand what's happening, but I'm sure it's all right." For that was her philosophy, coupled with gentleness and kindness to every other living creature, including even cats. They didn't always realize this, particularly if they were strangers, and there were anxious moments in the street sometimes, when a cat arched its back and Topsy came smiling towards it with her perilously vulnerable eyes. No disasters, though, of this sort, I'm glad to say. She never bit in her life. She liked birds, fish, rabbits, tortoises, and even toads. The only times when I can remember her snapping—or, rather, pretending to snap—were when large, stupid, vulgar dogs pressed their unwanted attentions on her. Then, I admit, there was a quick movement, and a high, short yap. But she had to preserve her little dignity and integrity, didn't she?

Now she was fitting into the pattern of our own simple lives, and already Rufus was appreciating her presence during the hours when even he must otherwise have been left alone. They slept in the drawing-room together, sometimes on the same chair. There was an added zest, as I have said, to his lunch and dinner on the dining-room floor. And you mustn't think that the Block was the extent of their outings. They went much further than that with us, on foot, on the tops of omnibuses, and sometimes in my extraordinary little car. On Sundays, when we all lunched with Diana's parents—at their big house on the same side of Church Street—of course both dogs were there, and were welcomed, too. And in the evenings, the quiet, happy evenings, with the children safe in their beds, while Diana read, or knitted, or embroidered, and while I read, or played the piano or the gramophone—or sometimes fiddled with the little portable wireless—the dogs slept again wherever they chose.

Ten o'clock. No one should be healthier, wealthier, or wiser than I am—I say "should," mark you—so far as early to bed and early to rise are concerned, and by ten o'clock, in those days, I was almost always beginning to think of bed myself. The thought led to action. "Dogs!" I said—and two heads rose and looked at me. "Out!" I added; and Rufus and Topsy both sprang on to the floor, and ran to

the big bow window. I opened it for them, they vanished into the darkness—for I hadn't yet had the floodlight fixed, which could be switched on from inside for their convenience—and presently they both returned. I locked up. Diana was putting her things away. Off with the reading-lamps. Off, a few seconds later, with the light in the hall. Up our wide, easy-going stairs—which were one of the many reasons why we had taken this house—and so, presently, all together again in the bedroom with the blue ceiling-paper covered with stars. Peace fell on 107, Church Street, for in that year there was still no reason why it shouldn't. And then we were all asleep.

I seem to have been doing pretty well, don't I, considering that the last time I mentioned our finances, I was working in an office because I couldn't earn a penny at anything else? Well, I'd been lucky so far. When Mary was born, which was shortly before one job sank under me—I wrote that first novel while trying to get another—I see that I had the sum of £34 9s. standing to my credit in the bank. If Diana had thirty-four shillings, I should be surprised, for her own balance was seldom as much as this, and neither of us had yet managed to save or invest anything at all. In fact, it sounds mad, and probably was, that we should have been living in a real house and employing a domestic staff which was on the point of rising from two to three. But we didn't know any better.

We felt that we were in a story, and that comparative poverty was bound to be succeeded by wealth. At my present age—but this isn't entirely my own fault—I feel just the other way about; a sign, no doubt, that innocence and youth have both gone. But back in Walpole Street I truthfully believed that one had a little trouble first, and then everything came right. And, by gosh, I wasn't far out.

There were troubles, without question. Illness. Some painful economies. The cruelty of servants. A night when some rich people kindly asked us out to dinner, and then—less kindly, perhaps—made us play a card game at which I found that I had lost the price of nearly a fortnight's lunches. (N.B.—I have never known a club from a spade, but they were Diana's friends, and I could see from her expression that I had to go through with it.) When I got home that evening I learnt that the fifth publisher had refused my first novel. Yet somehow, though there was less assurance in the middle of that night, I hadn't really been wrong.

When the second novel was printed and published, I suddenly wrote a short story. I didn't quite know what to do with it, but there was no point in not aiming high. So I posted it to the *Strand Magazine*, and only a few days later the most extraordinary thing happened. The telephone rang in the little back dining-room, and I answered it, for though I didn't much like working in the only room with a telephone, it hadn't yet occurred to me that one could have it moved. To my astonishment, a voice said that it was the *Strand*, and to my amazement and utter confusion it then asked me how much I wanted to be paid. I hadn't the faintest idea. I really needed at least twenty-four hours in which to accustom myself to this miracle that my story had been accepted at all, and I hadn't the remotest notion of how the market ran. I must have sounded fairly stupid during the next phase in the conversation, but finally I named a sum which must have brought joy into the voice's heart. The deal was clinched. And it seemed now that I wasn't only a novelist, but a short story writer as well.

Quite true. The *Strand* went on playing up. Egged on by an agent whom I daringly approached, it not only began paying me twice, and then three times, and then nearly four times as much, but took to ordering whole batches of stories in advance. So, as the agent appeared to wave his magic wand, did other magazines. Then he started tackling the novels, so that again my royalty wasn't only doubled and trebled, but I was getting a large lump sum on the day of publication. He didn't do this for nothing, of course, and unfortunately I still had to work. But the world was full of ideas then, and as I always felt that if I took a day off I should never force my weak character into any kind of action again, there was little rest for the pen.

Just about the time we left Walpole Street, it seems to have struck me that I still had a few spare moments, so that now I became a publisher's reader as well. I was paid by the hour, and what with this temptation to excessive labour, and the depressing nature of the job itself—for I was sorry for all the other authors, but only about one in twenty wouldn't have been better employed in chopping up wood—my reason began to totter; and particularly as I was now collaborating in the book (as they call it) of a musical play. Happy days? Yes, of course—or so it will always seem as I look back on them, even though I have never written a paragraph without stress



and strain, and even though I had jaundice and influenza at the same time.

But though after eighteen months or so I resigned my readership, and took to going out of doors again, you see how the luck had brought me to Church Street, and had provided me with a piano—which would subsequently be burnt as the result of “enemy action”—and with a portable wireless-set, and with an extraordinary little car. And in 1927 it still seemed to me, though I was thirty-five now, that all this, if one really wanted it, was just the normal course of events. What a wonderful time of life.

A word, if I may, about the wireless and the car; for I should like to convince you that it wasn't only Diana who was a pioneer. True, as is still the case, that she settled everything of the least importance, but I think it should be put on record that I could experiment in other matters as well as paper and ink. Take the wireless, then, which also started in Walpole Street. I had never heard one in those days, and very few people had. But I saw an odd-looking box in a shop-window, and I stared at it, and I came back again, and I went in, and I bought it. Also two pairs of head-phones—disgusting word, but that's what they were called—a contraption which they told me would turn my electric-light system into an aerial (whatever that was), and a lot of wire, and a metal clip. I didn't really think that anything was going to happen, for all my life, I am afraid, I have been tempted to buy gadgets that then failed to function; hope, in this matter, triumphing over experience again and again.

However, I followed the directions. I fastened the clip to a water-pipe in the basement. I ran the wire through some convenient holes until it reached the drawing-room. I attached it to the so-called crystal set. I plugged in the contraption, and attached another wire to another terminal. I screwed in one pair of the head-phones. I clapped them over my ears. I fiddled with the cat's whisker, as the directions described it. And I don't know that I have ever been more surprised in my life than when, in the early autumn of 1922, I suddenly heard the late Mr. Harry Tate broadcasting from 2LO.

I yelled for Diana, and she, supposing me to have been electrocuted, came running into the room at once. “Put this on!” I said, snatching off my head-wear. “Listen!” I think she said something

about her hair, but I was exalted and insistent, and presently she obliged.

"Do you hear it?" I asked, and with the appearance of having invented the whole thing myself.

"Yes," she said, quite calmly. "It's somebody talking, isn't it?"

She didn't seem the least impressed—though not one of our friends had yet taken this dashing step—and though I tried to make her spend the evening in one pair of head-phones while I sat in the other, I could get no real enthusiasm out of her, for she still thought them unbecoming, and still seemed to feel that a faint sound of music wasn't really as entertaining as a book.

As an author I should have admired her point of view, but as a pioneer I was a bit disappointed, for I didn't foresee what a curse this invention was going to be. A few days later I held the head-phones over Mary's ears—Mary being then about three—and suffered a further disappointment when she registered no interest at all. How little did I guess then that she would grow up into one of the generation who can't enter a room, or get up, or go to bed, without switching on a loud-speaker; not, apparently, so as to listen to it, but so as to break the dreadful silence that their nerves can't stand. But though I was a pioneer, I was no prophet. And in the matter of the extraordinary car I am the first to admit that both wife and daughter backed me from the start.

Again I saw it in a shop-window. It looked queer, but in those days—the summer of 1924—it was undoubtedly if comparatively cheap. £165 seems to have paid for the car itself, for its tax and insurance, for my admission to the Automobile Association, and for three driving lessons. I had one, brief, trial trip in it, just to see that it would move at all, and immediately took the plunge. Even the shop seemed surprised. "We're a very funny firm," I remember the Jewish salesman telling me; "we never do anything that isn't quite straight." This, I suppose, was a formula intended for laggards and hagglers, but there was no need for it in my case—though I certainly thought it funny—because I had already ordered the car; and also, let me say, because the shop never let me down.

But why only three driving lessons? It's quite simple. A friend had taught me to drive a more or less ordinary car about ten years ago, so that I still knew the rudiments, and hadn't exactly to start

from scratch. But my own car, once again, wasn't the least ordinary. In fact, it was a Trojan.

Do you remember them, and all the jokes about them? Their wheels had solid tires. The two-stroke engine was under the driver's seat, with a fly-wheel spinning fore and aft, and the transmission was by chain to one end of the back axle, so that, with nothing in the nature of a differential, the car wagged its tail on a straight road, and took corners as best it could. The body was small, though owing to the position of the engine there was, in fact, plenty of room for my very long legs; it was pale-blue; the back seat—which some people might have described as a shelf—could only be reached by swivelling one of the front ones; and protection against the elements consisted of a canvas hood and celluloid side-curtains. Its maximum speed was thirty miles an hour—but it did forty miles to the gallon—and it had one brake-drum, if you wanted to stop.

Well, as a matter of fact, that was quite effective. It was the starting that was a much greater difficulty. This was achieved, in theory, by adjusting the mixture, switching on the petrol and ignition—the same odd-looking key did both—and then jerking lustily at a long lever which otherwise lay flat on the floor. Once it was warm, this was child's play; but when it was cold, I must admit that it would often have been less exhausting to walk. Furthermore, if the engine once started and then stalled—and two-strokes hate idling, so that this was a special risk in traffic—there were virtually only two ways of getting it to fire again. The first was to summon the populace and get them to push. The second was to remove the floorboards, take out the sparking-plugs, and yank away at that lever until the compression had all been pumped out. As against these slight drawbacks, I may add that it had completely fool-proof and crash-proof epicyclic gears; and you couldn't only use the reverse as an emergency brake, but if you chose could shoot backwards and forwards merely by pushing the gear-lever to and fro. I could always get another laugh by doing this.

So in the summer of 1924 an instructor appeared with a demonstration model at the house on Campden Hill—for delivery of my own purchase was to take about three weeks—and Diana came out to see us off, and away we went. If any of my female readers are getting at all bored, I might now state that the instructor was considerably better-looking than their favourite film-star; but, of course,

what really affected me much more was that he was as merciless as a director. I'd had an idea that we should start gently in some quiet street, and so gradually work up; but this wasn't his notion at all. Being, I can only imagine, utterly fearless himself, he ordered me straight into Kensington High Street, and thence into one terrible stream of traffic after another. Or so it seemed in 1924, though of course London was still Arcady compared with 1938. Wherever five or seven streets met together, and if possible with tram-lines, there we appeared. His calm was appalling. My own heart was alternately in my throat and my shoes. Every now and then I stalled the engine—once, as I remember, in the archway at Hyde Park Corner, so that the effect was probably felt as far away as Victoria Station. But my god-like companion remained completely imperturbable throughout, and after three of these ghastly expeditions he gave me his blessing, and continued, I suppose, to risk his life elsewhere. If I could have backed out of my bargain at this point, I should probably have done so. But of course there were still moments when my pride swelled, for in that year—or at any rate in my own circle—motorists were still the exception rather than the rule. And Diana still seemed to think me dashing. And perhaps she was right.

On the day when I returned to the shop to take delivery of my own Trojan, and as I stood waiting, rather nervously, for it to be brought out into the road, a violent collision took place between two other cars, about fifteen yards away. One, I remember, had its whole radiator sheared off, and though no one was injured, I can tell you that it took character not to turn round and rush home. But I didn't. For of course it would have taken still more character to tell the salesman that I had changed my mind.

"Tut-tut," he said, with a careless glance at the gathering crowd. "Well, there you are, sir. Off you go."

I climbed aboard—oh, that terrifying smell of a new car and engine—I jerked at the lever, and off I went. I had become a motorist. Again I was exalted, but this time Diana was almost as excited as I was, and on the very next day she accompanied me, with extraordinary faith and courage, as far as Hampstead Heath. I stalled the engine there. In fact, I was always stalling it. But I never ran into anything, and with every other kind of adventure that Trojan took us a few weeks later as far as Devonshire and even Cornwall. The roads were much worse in those days—many of them still hadn't

recovered from the war—and when those solid tires hit a pot-hole, one knew it. Moreover, everyone laughed at our queer-looking vehicle wherever we went. But I was bitten and my blood was up. Two years later I exchanged the first, pale-blue Trojan for a dark-blue model with a slightly larger body and a back seat that was actually entered by a real though solitary door. And then, if you will believe me, there was a third Trojan, which was supposed to start more easily—I can't say that it always did—and in addition had so far fallen into line with its rivals as to be fitted with pneumatic tires. My top speed was now no less than thirty-five miles an hour, for these tires were held to justify a rather higher gear-ratio, and in a further burst of extravagance I had special dark-blue upholstery fitted to match the paint outside. Indeed, I looked like becoming the Trojan King.

It was in this third model, then—which I had now had for about five months—that Topsy was first taken to Battersea Park. That was the great place for the dogs now—with special, week-end outings to Wimbledon Common—and we must have been there hundreds of times, if they were all added up. Rufus, by this epoch, knew the peculiar purring noise of my engine so well that he would jump on to the dining-room window-seat when even a strange Trojan drove by. But Topsy, as a girl, was less mechanically-minded. It was enough for her that a vehicle appeared, that she was lifted into it, and that presently she was lifted out to potter along the broad, grass stretch between the road and the river. This was one of the few bits of Battersea Park where dogs were allowed without leads, so naturally we stuck to it. Up and down—slowly, because Pokes never hurry—in all four seasons of the London year. Rufus scampering in the winter, and panting in the summer. Topsy sniffing, and trotting, and sometimes running after a ball. “Come on, then. In again! Time to go home.” As the engine was still warm, there was no delay, and we were soon back. Then I put the car away in its public garage, and then I sauntered along the King's Road again, and it was nearly time for tea.

What else in those first weeks of Topsy's arrival, and of her swift accommodation to our hearts and lives? Diana and I still have our old diaries—so far—though hers was in fact more of an engagement-book, and mine seems to have concentrated almost entirely on what

I earned and spent. I think I had an idea that these entries would aid economy, and perhaps they did, for though I now seem to be representing myself as a bit of a grasshopper, I was actually a good deal of an ant. It still struck me as rather miraculous that I was earning anything at all, and I was still haunted by the thought of a rainy day. But thirty-five wasn't really old, and as I look at those entries and symbols, I see that mild prodigality was still breaking in.

The case of our dancing-lessons, for instance. It was the Darlington who inveigled us into this. W. A. Darlington, that's to say, or Bill Darlington, of *Alf's Button* and the *Daily Telegraph*, and his wife Marjorie, who were Chelsea neighbours and whom we had now known for some time. It seemed that they had a friend who was a dancing-instructress, and that they, and the Charles Morgans—also Chelsea in those days—and another friend, who was a gentleman-greengrocer, had all decided to set the passage of the years at naught by bringing their dancing up to date. Would we join them? The suggestion was so ridiculous that of course we joined at once.

The idea, I believe, was that when we had polished up our footwork and acquired the necessary technique, we should all go out somewhere together and give a public exhibition of our skill. But we never did. For a number of weeks, that autumn, we used to meet between tea and dinner, generally at the Morgans' flat overlooking the river, but sometimes in the Mackails' drawing-room, and there, to the music of a gramophone, we all circled and stumbled and tried to do what we were told. I had never much enjoyed dancing myself, Bill was what you might call distinctly allergic to rhythm, and Charles, as his friends are aware, has gone through life with an appearance of loathing almost everything. But our wives, poor dears, still thought that their literary husbands might be turned into cavaliers as well; or if they didn't, were determined that they shouldn't just start something and then stop it at once.

I'm bound to admit that we laughed a great deal. I am also bound to admit that as the classes went on, we thought more and more of the cocktails with which they invariably finished, and less and less of what we had learnt last time. Perhaps our instructress was too ambitious, for though most of us would have been content to find that we were dancing at all, she was resolved that we should learn something called the Yale Blues. Deep down in our hearts we felt that by the time she had achieved this, it would also be out

of date. But she was kind, and patient—and also extraordinarily cheap, so that I now seem to have selected a poor instance of thriftlessness—and week after week we plunged about to a tune called *Muddy Water*, in the vain endeavour to turn into a set of Astaires.

It was all very pleasant and foolish, though the dogs had to be shut up when our own house was used, and possibly it was good exercise, and certainly it did us no harm. But at Christmas there was a break, for somehow we all felt that the first term was now over; and somehow, again, the classes were never resumed. Self-consciousness seized us, or work pressed, or we knew that we were already beaten by the Yale Blues. No more preposterous evenings, and our instructress turned her attention—as was much more suitable—to our children instead. There was no wild night on a public dance-floor, with Chelsea showing Mayfair where it got off. An absurd interlude had ended, and we were all—except the gentleman-greengrocer, who was still a bachelor—fathers and mothers again.

November 7th. Children's half-term holiday, says Diana's engagement-book—which indicates that they were both now attending their first little school in Tite Street—and my own entry shows that she took us all to a matinée at the Alhambra, where there was a variety bill in those days, with five-shilling stalls. November 8th—the same entry by both of us this time—the Milnes dined.

It was through Milnes, of course, that we had come to know the Darlings, and now I'll tell you how we came to know the Milnes. Actually I had met them both—A. A. and Daphne—as long ago as the summer of 1913, when they were newly-married and I had just left Oxford, at a cricket-match organized by Barrie and E. V. Lucas. This was a thrill, because like everyone else I was a vast admirer of A. A. M.'s page in *Punch*, and now it seemed that I was meeting Myra, of *The Rabbits*, as well. If I made any impression on either of them, they disguised it, and the curtain falls for a matter of about twelve long years. Then *Greenery Street* was published. And then—this is what makes authorship worth while—a letter arrived from an address in Mallord Street (which wasn't yet just round the corner, for we were still on the slopes of Campden Hill), not only flattering me delightfully, but also asking both of us to lunch.

So far, in fact, so good. I was thrilled again. So was Diana. And we both set off full of excitement and hope. I have now to admit,

though—and the Milnes would be the first to agree with me—that that excellent lunch was as near a complete failure as anything could well be. I was desperately shy, but so was my host. Moreover, the Milnes had a refectory table in those days, which when four people are seated at it means that two are much too close together, while the other two are much too far apart. Yet though I should like to blame the table entirely, I know that I was dull and tongue-tied, and that Alan—as I shall now start calling him—must bitterly have regretted ever having posted his letter. In fact, one might almost call it a dreadful occasion—though we have all laughed about it since—and if the Mackails had stayed on Campden Hill, I don't suppose they would ever have seen the Milnes again.

But they left it. For all the months that they were there they pined for Chelsea. They had a well-planned, comfortable house—which was entirely demolished by a bomb in the autumn of 1940—and the children and Rufus were in easy reach of Kensington Gardens, of which full use was made. But Diana and I knew that we were exiles, and every time we got on a No. 9 or 33 omnibus, we wished it were a 19 or 22. Also, every time that we left or returned to our semi-detached house we were maddened by the jam of shoppers and window-gazers in Kensington High Street; so different from the peace and comparative simplicity of our own King's Road.

So we pulled up our moorings and moved again—though not until I had paid half the cost of rebuilding a joint chimney-stack which was suddenly discovered to be like the leaning tower of Pisa—and it was this that gave us our second chance with the Milnes. For not only were we near neighbours now, but their little boy was attending the school in Tite Street with our little girls. And this time the luck changed. Either we met without a refectory table (but presently I got another short story out of that), or else the original shyness had been overcome. The Milnes were our friends now, and our very generous friends too. They had started taking us to plays, as they continued to do with the most praiseworthy regularity, and every outing was preceded by a banquet, and concluded by our being deposited, in their bright blue car, at our own front door. Moreover, they had a terrific children's outing and banquet at Christmas. In fact, they couldn't have been kinder; so that it is a pleasure now to find that they dined with us twice in that month.



There was a little party each time, so that the dogs had to dine upstairs. But after dinner, always, or as soon as we were all back in the drawing-room, my first act was to release them. They descended with enthusiasm, they bolted out into the garden—barking sometimes, I am afraid—and only then did they greet the guests, with wagging tails and pounces (if not discouraged) on to their laps, before settling down to sleep for the rest of the evening. The Milnes, it must be allowed, were strongly pro-cat, and not only in theory, but they were kind to Rufus and Topsy too. "Get down!" they said, but they didn't say it sharply—if I'd thought they were going to, I shouldn't have let Rufus and Topsy get up—and Daphne (who is romantic) wanted to know if a marriage had been arranged.

"No," I said, for if Topsy had puppies of her own later on, I knew we should have to keep them all. "She's only," I said, referring to the title of a play which we had just seen together, "the Girl Friend." Henceforth Daphne would always inquire after her by that name; so you see that even a cat-lover in this case had a heart for my pop-eyed pets.

I see also that at the second Milne evening, towards the end of November, our other chief guest was J. M. B. If you have read a long book that I wrote about him, or, indeed, in any case, you will realize that there was considerable anxiety beforehand as to whether he were going to lift the whole party to glorious heights or plunge it into silence and gloom. One never knew, until the hour arrived, and then, of course, one must still accept whatever had been decreed. But I was as cunning as I could be, this time. I had provided a box of puzzles—rings, and twisted nails, and metal loops which had to be separated and then put together—and if there were any strain in the dining-room, it vanished as soon as this box appeared. For whatever he guessed, he couldn't resist the challenge, any more than the puzzles could resist his uncanny skill. No danger of silence now. His tongue was loosed by this triumph over our own clumsy fingers, and then the real entertainment began. I knew it, and indeed it was appreciated at the time, but in fact the biggest tribute must still wait for the morning. For this was the night—as I then discovered—when a taxi went slap through the wall of the Carlyle Square gardens, on the other side of the road. But not one of us heard it, because we were all listening to Barrie. And if you think you see a flaw here, of course he was listening, with just as

much interest and enjoyment, to himself. In other words, it was another very good evening, after all.

On the following afternoon the children gave a party, or we gave a party, or as a matter of fact their grandparents gave a party, at the big house further up the street. A quantity of flushed, bright-eyed contemporaries appeared, and danced, and ate and drank like anything, and were given presents, and watched a conjuror. All organized by Diana, who was as flushed and bright-eyed as any of them. As a father, and because it wasn't in my own house, I avoided the earlier and possibly chillier stage, but by the time I arrived there I can only say that everything was in full swing. The noise was appalling. The floor was littered with fragments of crackers. The hired electric gramophone—still a novelty in those days—was giving a penetrating performance, with the aid of its kind attendant. And I was rewarded, though I had contributed little or nothing, when my own children rushed up to me, and said, "Hullo, Daddy!" and tore away again. Or when they suddenly pressed small musical instruments or bits of artificial jewellery into my hands, said "Take care of this," and again were absorbed in the throng. School bills, and doctors' bills, and the years when perambulators had regularly gouged the paint off the front door and the paper off the walls inside, seemed well worth it on such an occasion as this. Was I a real father, then? Did the other children, and even my own contemporaries, see me in this still improbable light? It almost seemed like it, as I gazed giddily at my offspring springing, or spoke a friendly word to other alleged parents who had come to collect their own. When it was all over, Diana, of course, was in a state of almost complete collapse. "But I think they liked it," she has put in her engagement-book, and that was a reward for her, too.

But the main point, of course, from now onwards, was that Christmas was coming, and that we were to spend it, for the second rare season in succession, in our own home. That this had become an exception was due, again, to the generosity and hospitality of Diana's parents, who indeed had let us gorge at their country-house table year after year, and had saved us a great deal of expense by doing so. But this year they had just sold one country house and were in process of preparing another, so that though we were to lunch with them on Christmas Day itself—you see how I again take this for granted—the rest of the celebrations would be under our

own roof. Good, I thought, though still gratefully; for the illusion of independence was still something to cling to, and still I wanted to be a husband and father, rather than a son-in-law, if I could. Selfishly? Very likely. And again, of course, it was Diana who had all the work. Yet of course there's a special cosiness about Christmas at home.

At the last moment, I mean. Before that it is apt to weigh on a husband and father, wherever he is, as a reminder not only of his own age but of all that the future is going to cost. Yet here, once more, Diana spoilt me. "Have you bought any presents yet?" she had asked, time and again. I had always explained that I was going to, as soon as I had a moment to spare; and indeed before I was married I certainly never left it too late. But Diana didn't trust me, she hadn't anything like my distaste for crowded shops herself, and so, as the years went by, she had gradually taken over the whole job. I paid, of course. I wasn't as shabby as all that. But I confess I didn't always remember what I had given to whom, and there were some awkward moments when I was thanked, face to face, for gifts that weren't distinctly specified. "I'm so glad you liked it," I would say, with my old-world charm. Did the recipient penetrate my secret? Oh, well; everyone knows about husbands and fathers by this time.

On Christmas Eve, however, the seasonable spirit was apt to sweep over me, and I would suddenly rush into the shops and upset the whole of Diana's schedule by choosing presents for people whose parcels had been tied up two months ago. Or I came tearing in with extra decorations, for which there was now no room. Or I started sending out Christmas-cards which couldn't possibly arrive anywhere for days. In fact, I was now Scrooge in his pleasanter manifestation; and it was this year, I think, that I suddenly sat down and drew a coloured Christmas-card which was supposed to be from Rufus to Diana. It represented him standing wretchedly in the snow, in the garb of Santa Claus, trailing a heavily-laden sack with which, as you could tell from his expression, he hadn't the faintest idea what to do. It wouldn't have been kind, if Rufus could have recognized himself. But he couldn't, of course, and Diana laughed, and had it framed. It hung in the dining-room, and puzzled some of our visitors—though it was an excellent likeness—for years.

Was I an artist, then, as well as an author? In a sense. I used

to draw incessantly until I began writing so hard. I was always drawing for the children, until they grew too large to sit on my lap at the same time. And I had certainly developed a particular gift for portraits of Rufus. Two years earlier was possibly the high-water mark, when I executed a more than life-size version of him in the form of what Michael Angelo would call a cartoon, and then transferred it to a wool rug. You know; with a hook, and hundreds of different-coloured little lengths of wool. It was a masterpiece when it was finished, and would be still, if the moth hadn't got into it. This year—1927—I was similarly engaged on a view of the front of our house, from which I see now—though it, also, has suffered from time—how our railings were black then, and our window-frames white. So it must have been later that everything turned such a very bright green.

On Christmas Day it began snowing, very appropriately, though for me this was yet another reason to be glad that I wasn't in the country. And two nights later this snow was still lying, when Diana and I attended a party given by our neighbours next door. We barely knew them then—in fact, during the first year in Church Street I was such a typical Londoner that I don't even remember noticing their existence at all—but somehow (over the garden wall, I think) something had at last started. The parents were senior to us, and the children about half a generation younger, but it was the gay daughter, I'm pretty certain, who thought of asking us in. At once, as we arrived, we were in the thick of this unknown but extremely cheerful circle, which hitherto we had only heard laughing through the wall. I was shy again. And I was more perturbed than ever when I suddenly saw that we were all going to play roulette.

Diana, of course, adores a gamble. But you've had one glimpse of me at a card-game, and if I were shaky about clubs and spades, I hadn't the faintest conception of the difference between *manque* and *passee*. On the other hand I hesitated to say so, and certainly no one would have listened if I had. So I sat down, and bought some counters—it seemed easy enough so far—and began imitating the others to the best of my ability, if with little excitement and no comprehension at all. It all seemed to go on for a very long time, but presently the game appeared to be over, and then—to my relief and surprise—I was handed not only my original stake, but an additional twopence as well. This was wonderful; but, of course, you

see what it meant. At the card-game I had lost because I couldn't afford it. To-night, if I had been the richest player present, I should certainly have scooped the pool. My twopence merely indicated that I was now solvent and perhaps slightly more; which was the truth, in spite of Christmas, for the goddess of fortune never lies. So why gamble? I can't imagine. But Diana can, and though the rule is just the same for her, that's one of the thousand ways—especially as she never really plunges—in which she has taught me to appreciate what I can't understand. Her joy, when she backs a winner, is my joy, and frequently my profit—in the way of a treat or present—as well. But if she fails, she is just as happy, and I am spared both loss and grief. That's as it should be, isn't it? Well, it always seemed to suit us pretty well.

Home again, clinging to the railings, because of the slippery pavement, and another warm welcome from the dogs. I know they've had a dull evening—though not so dull for Rufus as when he was alone—but I know also that their own joy is now utterly free from the faintest trace of reproach. If we leave them, that's fate. If we come back, that's rapture, even though we have brought them nothing but ourselves. Good little dogs, with all your faith and trust. And to think that I had to learn this simple, obvious lesson from the tragedy of Porthos in the King's Road.

1927 is nearly over now. We appear to have celebrated its final evening by a visit to *Cinderella* at the Chelsea Palace—a twice-nightly version—but would be home, of course, in plenty of time to hear the New Year coming in. Whistles, sirens—no thought of their other meaning then, for in the last war we were warned by maroons—and the honking of motor-horns in the streets. But I'm still thirty-five, which isn't, surely, so very old, and the wishes that we exchange still seem more of a pleasant formula than a challenge to the threatening unknown. And so to bed—if, indeed, I'm not there already—and to sleep.

I'm wondering—not in my sleep, but long afterwards, in another, temporary home—what sort of portrait has slipped into these pages of the author when Topsy first came. I seem, now, to have represented myself as one to whom money comes with the minimum of effort, and who thinks of little or nothing except having a harmless good time. If so, I have been rather unfair to myself, on the

whole. I haven't only omitted the fits of black depression which I may have deserved, but which only time can relieve. But I've hardly said a word about sitting down at a desk every morning, as soon after nine o'clock as possible, and refusing to leave it, except for meals, until I have written at least twelve hundred words. Yet this is the rule, and even if the words all go into the waste-paper basket next day—as still happens far too often—nothing will induce me to consider anything less. I'm driving myself, because I still dread what may happen if I don't, and when at last I break off, I am frequently so exhausted that I can hardly get out of the chair.

Is this creditable? I don't know. There's no alternative. For some reason I have always had that doubt of my ability to earn a living, so that even now, when I'm doing it, I'm scared stiff of one idle morning, and go nearly frantic if I have to spend it in bed. My reputation, such as it is, in the world of monthly magazines, is that of a purveyor of care-free fun, and ever since that first novel reviewers have branded me as something called a Humorist. But this wasn't my aim. I was just trying to tell stories, to get bits of life on to paper, and, I suppose, to express myself. But not, it appears, the self that I know or can recognize; for where does all that gaiety and kindness come from when in real life I am a cynic and frequently a wet blanket as well? Extraordinary, what a pen does. Or what a pen can reveal, I should like to think; for, of course, I would much rather be a centre of sweetness and light. All the time, I mean; not merely in flashes that are then paid for, by myself and others, in oppression, and anxiety, and gloom.

Yet in any case I go on working; struggling with sentences; muttering bits of dialogue to myself; waiting three-quarters of an hour, suddenly, because I can't think of the right synonym; and still fighting that daily battle to achieve the twelve hundred words. The nearest thing to relaxation is when I type my own manuscripts, and revise them at the same time. Only now, of course, I am setting myself something much more like five thousand words a day. I have never troubled to add them all up at the end of the year, but the record for 1927 shows that my novel, *The Flower Show*, was published in the summer—so that I was probably still writing it in the spring; that I wrote the last four chapters of *Tales from Greenery Street*—which was now being serialized, and would appear next year—and that in addition to this, and not counting a certain number of

cheerful little articles, I delivered fifteen six-thousand-word stories to the monthly magazines. Admirable? Or insane? Is there a spark behind it all, or am I just a painful and pitiable example of industry that doesn't know how to stop? Well, who would be an author, anyhow?

I would, of course. I should like to be half-a-dozen other things as well, but versatility, I have heard, gets one nowhere, and I have a wife and two children—and two dogs now, bless their hearts—so everything must be turned into the one channel, so that bills may be paid and provision be made for the inevitable rainy day. I didn't know, of course, that when it came it would be accompanied by a vast rise in prices and a simultaneous depreciation of everything that I had managed to save. For in 1927 I believed, like others, that the human race had had its lesson about wars. I still thought that the gaff was blown for at least one generation. I never guessed that even in my puppy's lifetime the whole dreary, weary business would have boiled up again.

## CHAPTER II

\*

1928

OUT come two more diaries, or at any rate an account-book and an engagement-book, from their present, temporary shelves. And almost the first entry in both of them, for this new year of 1928, is an allusion to the Children's French lessons; for if it were Diana who arranged for them, it was undoubtedly I who wrote the cheques. One might think, if French were considered necessary, that the Tite Street School would have attended to it, especially as I seem also to have sent them a cheque for the odd sum of £25 16s. 6d. But there was more in it than that. Diana had had a French governess herself once, and now, years afterwards, this character was still on the scene; for she was still determined to live in London, though finding it no easier, poor thing, to follow her old career. So the former pupil's heart was touched, the same thing happened to my pocket, and the children were sent forth for afternoon walks with that still agile alien, and returned with her for tea. When my own parents inflicted a French nurse on me, the result was that I taught her

a great deal of English without learning any of her own lingo at all. Or the utmost length to which I went was to converse with her in broken English, which she may or may not have found intelligible, but at which I became remarkably good. I also blew her up—or to be quite accurate, my elder sister did—with a box of chemical experiments that my uncle had given me. But there was no malice in this. It was an entire accident, and I was just as frightened as she was.

Reverting, however, to Diana's Mademoiselle, we now enter on a phase where it was useless for the children to try and teach her English, not only because so many others had already failed, but because she was quite incorruptible, and even tried to make Diana talk French. The children learnt little or none, so that it's still rather hard to say what actually happened on those walks; though there can be no doubt that they distinctly resented the whole idea. Yet there she was, always apparently in need of employment, and never hesitating to write to Diana (in French, of course) to say so. That's the danger of having a kind heart, and if our innocent offspring suffered from this Mademoiselle, they certainly didn't lose in other ways. But I smile now when I see, a little later in Diana's book: "Must stop French lessons." And then, only a little later still: "French lessons start again." It was a long time before this governess finally faded out of our lives, and before it became possible to be quite frank about the French. Would I go back to the days when I, too, must attempt a few idiomatic phrases at the tea-table? It's no use asking. The children, as I still call them, wouldn't hear of it. They've never forgotten what they regarded as the injustice of those walks.

Here's another little dinner-party, followed by another visit to the Chelsea Palace—to see Miss Nellie Wallace this time—on the first Saturday in January. And the principal guest, I am glad to say, is a great friend of ours still. Do you remember that reference to my collaboration in a musical play? Well, I finished my own share in it; backers were found—though not by me; it was tried out in Manchester and Birmingham, and then it came to London and actually ran for a hundred and sixty performances. It is true that by this time the backers had lost all their money, but this—if it isn't actionable to say so—is quite easy in the theatre, even with a success. Two tours went out, of which one continued to send me nice little



cheques, while the other continued to elude my agent and his solicitor. And then everything stopped, the last curtain fell, and the whole thing, I should say, is now pretty well forgotten even by those whose livelihood once hung on its fate.

But it had left its effects on me. In the first place I had entered the musical-comedy *coulisses*—all previous contacts having been with the legitimate stage—where I was touched and charmed by the natives' good manners. It is true that they all called me by my Christian name the first time they caught it, and expected me to do the same to them, which was a bit of a surprise for a few days. It is true also that their readiness to promise anything to anyone hardly ever led to results, and that most of them would have pinched pennies from blind men without the slightest sense of shame. But never have I been in a circle where introductions were more punctilious, or where hospitality—especially of the kind that can be signed for on a chit—was more open-handed. All this fascinated me. And it didn't only do that; it gave me a fund of material for further short stories.

While in the second place, since the whole object and origin of the venture had been to supply a vehicle for Miss Dorothy Dickson—who at that time had just starred three times running at the Winter Garden Theatre, which was then at the very height of its fame—there actually came a moment when I met her, too. Of course I was scared. She was incredibly lovely, she danced like a dryad, she had been flattered by—roughly speaking—a million admirers, and she stood, in my mind, for everything that was exotic and expensive and artificial and right out of my world. I was therefore considerably astonished when I discovered, within a few minutes, that she didn't only understand everything I said, that she wasn't only bursting with intelligence—yes, and with wit as well—but that she didn't possess so much as a vestige of conceit.

To say the least of it, this was remarkably interesting, and it wasn't long before Diana had made all the same discoveries, too. Did we call her Dorothy, then? It seemed that we did. Soon enough, in fact, we were even calling her Dot. Diana came up to Manchester when I was there, and again the friendship prospered. It was at this phase that I was discovering that Dot, for all the froth and rubbish that she had appeared in, had the artistic conscience of Mrs. Siddons. That she never forgot a new line that I gave her—and at

this phase, also, she was being peppered with new lines between every show—or could conceivably fail to drop anything that had been scrapped. She also continued to dance like a dryad, and to sing like a lark; and though by this time very little of my original stuff remained—for there wasn't only the other collaborator, but the producer, and the composer, and a well-known comedian who was a member of the management, all with ideas of their own—I was still enthralled by the star's performance. And quite rightly; for the whole success in London was entirely due to her.

It was all great fun for all of us, though, and especially after a well-timed broadcast had turned a rather shaky beginning into something like triumph. And when it was all over, though a dozen or more apparent intimates all vanished instantly from our lives, Dot, it appeared, was still our friend; and though she is a poor correspondent—at the moment I can think of no other faults—we have all gone on meeting and laughing together ever since. So that it was she who dined with us to go and see Miss Wallace, and as I go on with this story, you'll certainly be hearing of her again.

And of someone else, too. Yes, of course—though she was probably in bed that evening—she must come into the story now. For at the end of a *matinée* performance of that musical comedy—I should say approximately, in December, 1924—I entered the more public of the two rooms at His Majesty's Theatre which, when I first knew them, had been Sir Herbert Tree's; and there, sitting on a sofa, I saw a little girl.

"This," said Dot, emerging from the inner room, "is Dorothy."

I was less confused than you are, for I already knew that she had a child at school. But as I looked at that child now, it came over me, in a flash, that if I didn't immediately set myself to doing everything in my power to make her my friend, too, then I should be guilty of the most ghastly mistake. So I did. The child, thank Heaven, seemed to think I was rather funny; or if she didn't, then she, also, had perfect manners and the most delicious laugh. So I rushed home and told Diana, who immediately believed me, and the next thing was that little Dorothy—who has become Dot, too, now, but I must distinguish between them somehow—had accepted an invitation to tea. This, though I didn't know it then, was more than an ordinary triumph, for she had a holiday governess who was extraordinarily particular as to where she should be allowed to go,

still more particular as to where she might go alone, and most particular of all about what she must wear and eat.

As a result of this we formed the erroneous impression, when the governess was trustful enough to leave her at our door, that the child was dreadfully delicate. However, after she had removed most of the superfluous garments which she had been told to keep on, she very much relieved our minds by turning head over heels in the nursery; while a little later—also to our relief—it was found that she wasn't necessarily confined to a diet of brown bread and butter. Dear little Dorothy, that was fun, too, wasn't it? And it was fun when we went down, in one of the Trojans, and took you out for picnics at your school. And fun when you came to plays with us. And special fun on that afternoon at Maskelyne's, when the conjuror invited someone to go up on the stage, and you gave me such a nudge that I was there before I knew what had happened. I remember that he then put me where I could see rather less of the illusion than if I had stayed in my seat. But I think he was puzzled by the peals of laughter which greeted his successful efforts to produce confederates out of an empty cabinet. For of course he didn't realize that this was you laughing at me.

Many such afternoons, I am glad to think, and we were still friends even when you grew up, and became Miss Dorothy Hyson, and began acting in plays and films yourself. If we ever get there, there is going to be one tremendous occasion on which I am going to spread myself, and you know already what it is. But that's a long way off yet; and just now all I can find about you is that at the beginning of February—so that it looks as if you were at school in London at the moment—you came out to lunch with us on a Saturday, and then back, for games with us and the Milnes, and for what I trust was a good tea.

At any rate I can still hear you thanking us, which you did oftener and more politely than any child I have ever known. And at any rate, also, it must have been pretty clear by this time that we were determined not to let you escape.

I've skipped a date, I see. I'm now going back to the last night in January, when, as Diana and I have both noted, the Hopwoods dined. That's interesting and shouldn't be omitted; not only because Diana and Frank Hopwood had once attended the same dancing-

class—which was long before I knew either of them—but also because he and Audrey had come to live in Walpole Street just after us, and had had two children there—Moirra and Michael—and a Pekingese, called Monty, and had even anticipated us in the matter of a much more glorious car. So there were links indeed, and no other guests were needed, when we all had so much to say. There was a kind of competition, which the Hopwoods always won, in the province of food and drink on these occasions, and I don't know that I invariably felt at my best and brightest when they were over. But they were extraordinarily cosy while they lasted, for Frank and I knew what was right or wrong with everything, from politics to carburetters, and the more old brandy we sipped, the wiser we both became. Or Audrey and Diana would talk about children and servants, while we pretended that such topics were beneath us, but actually—since it was all about our own children and servants—were just as engrossed as our wives. Frank was a pioneer, too—as that car suggests—and if I were ahead of him with my crystal set, he was well ahead of me with the first radiogram. And probably with the first refrigerator, and all the other things that we thought we ought to have then, and gradually managed to afford. He worked very hard in the City, and he bought my books, too, which my friends as a rule seemed to avoid. That was a pleasant evening, I'm quite certain, as we all sat there, with Rufus and Topsy, and the comforting knowledge that whatever our servants were up to, our children were safe in bed.

February 6th. A cheque for ten shillings to the League of Nations Union. Not very lavish, you may say, and even less so when you learn that this was Diana's subscription as well as my own. On the other hand I had been driven, by the flood of pamphlets which our first year's membership had produced, to beseech them to take my money and spare my letter-box. And we *could* have been members at a considerably cheaper rate. They were surprised, and a little piqued, when I made these unusual terms. But as an author I couldn't bear to have literature in the house that I knew I couldn't read, and the truth is that those ten shillings a year were a kind of superstitious insurance. I didn't want another war, and though I was aware, deep-down, that a League of Nations without the United States was little or no use at all, I still didn't want to be

reproached on the Day of Judgment for having done nothing. So I made Diana join, too—though I always paid for her—and at first the Union boomed and expanded, and I almost felt that it was doing something. Later its communications, which I couldn't entirely subdue, became rather pathetic, as though things weren't going too well. And finally, when it did honestly seem to me that the remnants of the League were provocative rather than pacific, I'm afraid that I—and therefore Diana—resigned. Was the second war my own fault, then? I don't think so. My prayers and will-power were always resisting it, but what can a unit even in a Democracy do? Vote, you may say, for the policy most likely to produce peace. Yes, but the last General Election was in 1935, when both parties were swearing by the League, but the Labour Party, on the whole, seemed more anxious—though still resisting rearmament—to threaten foreign powers. And anyhow the Conservative or National Government candidate at Chelsea was returned by a majority of well over twelve thousand, so that I could hardly affect the result. At the moment of writing he has been transformed, without any appeal to his constituents, into His Majesty's Ambassador at Madrid, so that Chelsea isn't represented in Parliament at all. This shows, perhaps, what Governments think of electors, but it remains remarkably hard for an elector to show what he thinks of Governments. I don't, therefore, propose to accept more than my own share of responsibility; at any rate until at least one Minister has publicly apologized for his share in getting us all into this mess. And when that happens, there will also be a bright blue moon.

A pleasanter topic, especially when it isn't too far away, is money. And for some time now it had seemed to Diana and me that her father was becoming a magnate. Naturally we didn't ask to see his pass-book, and by our own standards he could easily seem rich enough when real millionaires would have wondered how on earth he made both ends meet. But there were signs, for all that. In the last few years he had certainly seemed to be sharing in some boom as well. In fact, he had two Rolls-Royces now, though they were both second-hand. And a surly chauffeur, who took advantage of him—another sure symptom that no wolf is near the door. Last summer, moreover, he had rented a rum-looking ruin overlooking the Solent—a district where surtax was regarded as part of one's natural fate—

and ever since then a body of men had been repairing and decorating it, while others were putting the large garden into order. I hadn't seen it myself yet, but Diana had been down there many times with her mother, and had tried to describe it to me—as a romantic, stucco pavilion, apparently, with a detached and purely ornamental tower. I couldn't help thinking that the landlord was rather lucky, as in addition to the rent he was having all these improvements for nothing. But of course I was looking forward to my first sight of it, when at last it should have been made habitable.

Meanwhile, there was another sign from the new tenant. Quite suddenly—or at any rate to the recipient's complete surprise—he told Diana that he was going to give her an American car. He must be a magician, we both felt. Yet as she would be unable to drive it, this was virtually the equivalent of offering it to me, and though I was overwhelmed, I was also rather alarmed. For of course one mustn't look gift-horses in the mouth, and of course it was extraordinarily and typically generous. But I'd been bouncing about in my third, blue-upholstered Trojan for only a little more than six months, I knew just what it cost to run, and the American car wasn't only more than twice the horse-power—which meant more than twice the tax and insurance premium—but would use nearly three times as much petrol, and would increase the garage rent as well. In fact, I was in rather a fix—not that I expected or would receive any sympathy—but of course there was only one thing to do. I joined in the gratitude that we both felt, I resold the third Trojan to that “very funny firm”—which certainly helped with the additional overhead—and suddenly I found myself not, as I had sometimes dreamed, in a slightly less ridiculous car, but at the wheel of a majestic monster with six cylinders, plush upholstery, a saloon body, and four doors.

It would look queer and top-heavy to-day, and I'm bound to admit that its chief advantages over the Trojan were that the engine always started, and that it idled so inaudibly that at first I always thought it had stopped. It had miserable acceleration, for it weighed far too much, its hand-brake was useless—which Americans seemed to prefer—and the foot-brake really needed adjustment about once a month. Furthermore, since it had originally been designed for left-hand drive, the right-hand steering-column had been shoved clean through everything that, in America, would have been well out of

its way; with the result that only a contortionist could get at the oil-filler, or the distributor, or anything else.

Nevertheless, of course we were proud of it, and so were the children, though I was always afraid that they would fall out of one of the back doors. The dogs, also, far preferred plush to leather, as it gave them a grip when we stopped or turned corners. And it was going to be a big thrill, no doubt, when I first exceeded thirty-five miles an hour. I could only just get my legs between the fixed front seat and the thick, wooden steering-wheel. But I did, and on the Sunday after it was delivered I see that Diana and I drove down for lunch at the Newlands Corner Hotel—where she had once stayed when it was the St. Loe Stracheys' country house—almost as if we were real motorists at last. I still thought of my Trojans sometimes—particularly, perhaps, when the monthly garage bill came in—but the vision was fading, and subtly and swiftly the whole standard was changed. Of course it would have been still more exciting if I had bought the new car myself, and if it had represented my real position in life. But these thoughts were selfish and ungrateful; for who would wish his father-in-law to be penniless, if he could possibly be anything else?

Add the American car to the background, then, as February drifts into March. Yet before that happened, we had a different and much worse shock. Poor Rufus suddenly fainted. For a moment we had thought that it was even worse than this, but he came round, and of course we sent for his doctor at once. Kind Mr. Batt, who has looked after all our dogs, came along with his stethoscope, and looked grave. Heart, he said, though Rufus was still less than eight. It might happen again, or it mightn't, but we must watch for it, and be careful, and see that he never got too tired. All of which we did from that moment, but always now with anxiety somewhere in our minds. I am afraid this has got to be added to the background, too.

It was March now, though, and here, right at the beginning, is another entry in my diary, and a blank in Diana's, which rather suggests that she was dining alone with the dogs. It was a special evening, though, and she quite understood. Back we go again to the first novel, of which I am now so heartily ashamed, but which led, almost directly, to so much in both our lives. It had been published some months, when a letter reached me in which I found it

hardly possible to believe. For it was signed P. G. Wodehouse, and unless someone were pulling my leg, he had read that novel and he had actually written to praise it. I dismissed the suspicion, though, and I was quite right. I showed the letter to Diana, who nearly wept with pride. I answered it, of course, promptly and appreciatively; for though he was still some way from his subsequent eminence, I had loved his books for years. And a little later, as if this weren't enough, he wrote again and asked me to dinner at one of his Clubs.

As I need hardly tell anyone of his acquaintance, by the time I reached the Club in question he had already become disgusted with it, and rushed me off to the Savoy Grill-Room instead. There he provided a considerable banquet, and immediately started talking about writing, without a moment's delay. For this—apart from Pekes, which he, too, would presently own and adore, and cricket and football matches at his old school, with which he also seemed obsessed—was his own great, unending topic; and at all the evenings that we have spent together I can't remember his ever lingering, for more than a few seconds, on anything else. Yet on this first occasion he did tell me one rather interesting bit of history. I had accepted his invitation from 23, Walpole Street—the original letter had reached me in the country—and it seemed now that he had once lived, in lodgings, at that very address. This was fascinating. Yet oddly enough it wasn't the end of the story—though we didn't know this then—for when the Mackails left Number 23, they disposed of it to the Maxtone-Grahams; and Mrs. Maxtone-Graham would soon be writing, for *Punch* and other papers, as Jan Struther and then, for *The Times* and a vast American public, as Mrs. Miniver. And that wasn't the end of it. The house then passed into the occupation of Douglas West, another author who has both cursed and flattered me as a critic; so that if literature didn't ooze from its walls after that, they must have been even less sensitive than they seemed.

Oh, dear. How often I dream that we are back there. For nothing can ever take the place or dull the memory of the first little house, and even *Greenery Street* failed to get it out of my system.

The point is, however, that Wodehouse soon started coming there, where he at once took a great fancy to Rufus, and he met Diana, and Diana met Mrs. Wodehouse, and presently we both met her daughter, and by that time they had become Plum, and Ethel, and Leonora, and there was a pretty good friendship going all round.



But every now and then Plum and I would have a quiet, literary evening together, and that's what we were doing on March 1st. At the more venerable and impressive of my own Clubs—but they could feed you well there—ending up in the long room on the top floor, which with any luck we would have to ourselves.

"I say, touching this matter of Pokes . . ."

"I say, when you get absolutely stuck in a story . . ."

"I say, what do you *really* make of old Somerset M.?"

These were all Plum's openings, as we smoked and sipped, and hammered each subject with our mighty brains. Most enjoyable, I can tell you. At about half-past ten—for we always dined early—we suddenly started rushing through the streets, at Plum's prodigious pace, until a point where, just as suddenly, he had vanished and gone. No lingering farewells from that quarter. I *might* hear him saying Good-night, from the middle of the traffic; I *might* catch a glimpse of his rain-coat swinging across the road. But the general effect was that he had just switched himself off. It was the custom. And in those days, of course—unless he were also dashing off to America—there would always be another of these evenings quite soon.

I did no work on March 2nd. Not because of any hang-over, but because at last the children and the dogs and I were all going down with Diana for our first sight of her parents' new house on the Solent. It rained all the way; but whereas my first Trojan had had no screen-wiper at all, and even in the third one I had to keep on working it by hand, the new American car was furnished with a suction-operated contraption that swished to and fro like anything—except when one was going fast. So we bowled down through Basingstoke, and Winchester, and the outskirts of Southampton, and then turned to the left, and arrived. It was indeed a place and an estate that were waiting there, with a long drive, and even a lodge. The low, decorative house had a battlemented tower at each end—so that it was actually more than even a super-pavilion—and there was the third, tall tower on the lawn, with steps just beyond it going down to the sea.

All most luxurious and impressive, especially when I learnt—though it was some time before the general public seemed aware of it—that this was a private beach. A concrete bathing-house was being erected. No, two of them—one for the staff. A hard tennis-court was

being made in one of the fields. I had never dreamt of being even distantly connected with such an establishment, and regarded my father-in-law with renewed respect.

Nothing altered Diana, or ever could. This wasn't *her* house, thank goodness, and she looked on it, as I did, with considerable detachment and awe. Later we, and the tenants, were to discover two features that made it something short of a paradise. In the first place it was only a few hundred yards from a seaplane base, so that in fine weather, and more and more as time went by, one was deafened by the roar of engines just overhead. While in the second place it was only a few miles from something called a cracking-plant for crude oil, and when the wind was in the right, or wrong, direction, there was such a smell that it could wake one up at night. Wealth could do nothing here; indeed both noise and smell were helping to produce it. But during that first week-end I can remember noticing neither. There was a hot sun, even at the beginning of March. There were safe walks for the dogs, and a vast lawn for them to play on. There were stimulating and romantic moments when huge liners came gliding past the far end of it. So that as we returned on the Monday—Topsy, for some reason, travelling flat on her back by my side, which at least showed great confidence in the driver—we felt that we, too, however vicariously, had taken another step up in the world. And we had all been invited back again for Easter.

The month ended, as it always did, with celebrations in honour of Mary's birthday. She was nine this year, improbable as it seemed. On the Saturday before the anniversary we took her, and some others, to lunch at the Criterion and to a *matinée* of *The Yellow Mask*—a musical play with book by Edgar Wallace, and tremendous effects and thrills. While on the anniversary itself—March 28th—there was a gathering of contemporaries at Church Street. Two days later I actually took a Saturday morning off, and we all saw the Boat Race from the A. P. Herberts' house in Hammersmith Terrace. And just a week after that, but this time with unfinished manuscripts in my suit-case and a certain weight on my mind, we all went back to the Solent.

"How lucky you are," people, and especially women, would so often say to me, "to be able to take your work with you wherever

you go. Now, *my poor husband . . .*" And so on. But, surely, they missed the point. For although their poor husband was a stock-broker, and admittedly had to go to an office, his partners were still earning money for him when he didn't, and when he took a holiday his work couldn't possibly follow him to the seaside. Not so with the author. The second he stops working, he stops earning, and since his entire equipment consists—or consisted in my case—of some paper, a dictionary, a thesaurus, a small note-book, and a fountain-pen, he has no excuse for leaving them behind. So he doesn't, or I didn't, and there I was, in a bedroom at Nonesuch (as I am going to call it), still having the daily battle with those twelve hundred words.

And the weight on my mind? Well, that was because I was an author, too. A brusque, medieval document had summoned me to serve on a jury, right in the middle of what were at any rate the children's holidays, and though in my case this meant closing down my one-man business for as long as my persecutors chose, the authority to whom I had pointed this out hadn't even troubled to reply.

Heavens, how I loathed that week in a jury-box. The frightful discomfort. The foul air. The appalling languor of the proceedings. The deaf witnesses. The rude Counsel. The Judge who sat making faces at us—but I was told afterwards that he was a bit mad, and couldn't help this—and took everything down in longhand at his own snail-like pace. As the dreary case was opened, I realized within five minutes that the two half-imbecile litigants should both have been smacked and told to go home. But big money was involved—the Judge alone was getting a hundred pounds a week—and no one was going to be so short-sighted or public-spirited as to do that.

Day after day it trickled along, until suddenly the jurors were all taken to a tiled cellar—like a large lavatory, but without any of the plumbing—and were locked in. I immediately had a sharp attack of claustrophobia, but recovered presently to find that though eleven of us were agreed on our verdict, there was one woman—who clearly hadn't listened to a word—with a fixed resolve to be a heroine in the cause of obstinacy. We all tackled her in turn, but she was merely flattered and tried to look like Joan of Arc. Finally I had an inspiration. What, I suggested, about a rider?

I got this idea, of course, from reading novels, and certainly not

from my knowledge of the law, but it was accepted almost at once. More or less at the woman's dictation I penned a paragraph which directly contradicted the verdict, but everyone seemed satisfied now, and we rang the bell and were let out. As we had wasted several hours in our cellar, we found on our return that another case was well under way, and it was some time before anyone took any notice of us. Fortunately, however, the Judge seemed to have forgotten all about our own case, and accepted the rider with no more than the usual rictus. We were free. I was given three pounds—it ought to have been three guineas, but the usher kept back all the odd shillings, and none of us dared ask for them—and I left the premises, I am afraid, with the most genuine contempt of court.

Barrister-fodder, that was all I'd been: for of course our verdict was the Judge's verdict, and if we hadn't delivered it we should only have been punished again. Yet there in the gallery, day after day, had been rows of people with nothing else to do, and a passion, apparently, for this ghastly atmosphere and procedure. Well, why couldn't they send the usher up there to collect a dozen and let them earn something as well? Too reasonable. A barrister to whom I put this proposal—and all barristers, by the way, are exempt from jury service—looked as shocked as if I had tried on his wig.

"It's your duty," he said.

"Well," I said, "at any rate I don't fine my own public if they won't buy my books. Wouldn't it be fairer if I could?"

The gulf remained wide open, though, and that's enough of a very painful subject. I had lost a lot of money, a lot of time, and a lot of fresh air. But my family were back at Church Street now, the Easter painters were out of the house, and at last I could get on with my work. From Diana's entries: "April 26th—Took the children in a motor-launch to the Tower of London." "April 28th—Took the children to Mme. Tussaud's." Signs of the end of their holidays. Church Street was beginning to pick up its summer rhythm again.

And Topsy was nine months old now, or in other words grown-up. We looked at her, and we were almost indescribably fond of her, but it was useless to pretend now that she was ever going to develop Rufus's kind of coat. It was silky and shiny, especially after a brushing, and she had the most becoming and sumptuous ears. The dark markings on her back, like wings—which are part of the Pekingese design—were as decorative as one could wish. Her tail,



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DIANA WITH RUFUS AT THE DINING-ROOM WINDOW



such as it was, was carried jauntily. Her face was still black, gentle, and kind. But strangers still thought that she was younger than her age, and would go on thinking this almost as long as she lived. She was a sleek Peke, but of course we were never going to admit that she was freak Peke. There were immense bonds between us, already; and we wouldn't have changed her, in any way, if we could. Topsy. Or, of course, a dozen other intimate nicknames by now, such as all our dogs have had. I can't remember half of them, for they flickered from month to month; but she waved her tail at all of them, and blinked, with slight embarrassment, when we spoke of our affection, and continued to be a very good, affectionate girl indeed.

Now it was time for the sun-blinds to be put up again, at the back of the house. Now, also, as the days grew warmer, the drawing-room windows could be left wide open, so that as we sat inside we could hear the constant trickle from the little fountain in the garden. That had been another extravagance, just about a year ago, and I think we had started the goldfish by now. Singular or plural? Plural at first; but more than one attempt, I fear, before they began to survive. Then—though not yet—two hardier examples decided to settle down. They would be known, respectively, as Fishwick (after the successful lady-golfer) and Fishbel (out of compliment, though we weren't acquainted with her, either, to Miss Ishbel MacDonald); and I fed them regularly, and sometimes had hopes that they recognized me. Twice a year, also, I caught them both in separate slop-pails, round which they swam rather desperately, while I emptied, and cleaned, and re-filled their real home. I would have done more for them if they had let me, for indeed I was devoted to them both; though perhaps more particularly to Fishwick, who lived longer and was always the handsomer of the two. The sound of gently trickling water still reminds me of him, and of hot afternoons in the drawing-room, or the little garden with green trellis over its whitewashed walls.

At this season, also, a fresh destination became available for the dogs. Burton Court—only a few yards from our old home in Walpole Street—the big, green enclosure to the north of the Royal Hospital. Actually, it was available in the winter as well, but it was apt to be rather muddy then, and we all preferred it in the summer. We had made no attempt to enter it during the six years that we lived so near, for at that time it was still filled with huts that had

been built there for the Ministry of Pensions. But when we returned to Chelsea, I applied to the Secretary of the Hospital—though I said rather more about the children than the dogs—and he was kind enough to furnish me with a pass.

For Burton Court, which would later be dug up again for air-raid shelters, was a kind of Arcadian Club. There was no entrance fee, there was no subscription, and it was left entirely to that Secretary to decide whether you were worthy of admission or not. But if he thought you were, then he sent you the annual pass, and all you had to do after that was to ring the bell by a door in St. Leonard's Terrace, whereupon a sergeant would open it, and salute you, and let you in. One half of the enclosure was full of children, and nurses, and dogs; but the other half was sacred to the officers in the Brigade of Guards, who played cricket there in the summer, and such was the strength of tradition that no child or any kind of attendant would dream of crossing the central path. But our half, where the non-commissioned ranks played both cricket and football, was otherwise entirely for our own enjoyment, and a very peaceful and pleasant scene it was. The more regular visitors kept their own deck-chairs, which were stacked by the gateway, and picnics were a common occurrence on warm afternoons. Oh, yes, my children went there too, dozens if not hundreds of times, but never quite so often—because of French, and dancing, and games with their school-fellows in Battersea Park—as Diana and I and the dogs. Our car stood outside it day after day, and we came to know almost all the members by sight.

And that reminds me, and I have just looked it up, and there it is. Cheque to Mr. Anderson, about whom I know nothing else now, for one pound. That was in this summer of 1928, and the reason was that the guardian sergeant, whom we had also known by sight now for quite a number of years, was to retire, and leave his little lodge, and a new sergeant was to take his place. In England, of course, there is always someone to treat this with the proper ceremony, and it was Mr. Anderson who broke the news to me one afternoon, and told me that he was making a collection for a farewell gift. Hence my pound, and further contributions from others, with which a silver inkstand was procured. And then took place an alfresco presentation, on a corner of the more public lawn, with the sergeant standing stiffly at attention, with a knot of members gathered round



him, and with Mr. Anderson making a short but effective speech.

The inkstand was handed over, and now, of course, it was the recipient's turn. He took a deep breath, he began speaking, and suddenly I saw—indeed, we all saw—that tears were pouring down his cheeks. For poor Sergeant M——, it seemed, for all his martial bearing and all the fierceness with which he had sometimes addressed unruly children or dogs, wasn't only a mass of sensibility at this moment, but was miserable at having to leave his neat little home. I looked away. We all coughed and pretended that it hadn't happened, and the proceedings came to an abrupt and informal close. But it was a pretty dreadful business while it lasted. It haunted me. It haunted Diana. We never saw him again, and the next time we went there we were saluted by his burly successor. All rather sad, and most certainly not to be turned into a short story. Indeed not; for even if I avenged myself on that jury again and again, I could never be as heartless an author as all that.

Whitsun, and back again—all six of us—to Nonesuch for another week-end. A further sign of my father-in-law's interesting position. He had gone and bought a yacht. I can't tell you what sort of yacht it was, except that it had a big mast in the middle and a little one at the back, and that it was run by a captain, a crew of one, and a steward with a squint. But there it was; or, rather, not quite there, because the sea wasn't deep enough, but moored near the end of a pier in Southampton Water, some miles away. So the Mackails all went out in it, after a rather anxious time in its dinghy, and it was another fine day, and none of them was sick. On the other hand, I am not sure, personally speaking, that yachting was quite my game. Even with cushions the deck was extraordinarily hard, and always, as it seemed, either much too hot or far too cold. The saloon smelt like all saloons, and I bumped my head in it. I was invited to take the wheel, but had no real feeling, either then or afterwards, that I was exercising any positive kind of control. As for the owner, he had fulfilled a long-standing and deep-seated ambition, but when it came to the point, I doubt if he had now found complete satisfaction. Certainly, after a very short time, he seemed unaccountably busy whenever a sail was suggested, and much readier to offer it to his relations and friends. He liked it best, I think, when he went off by himself, and could sleep without danger of interruption; but though he wasn't unduly punctual in his own arrangements, it naturally

vexed him that the yacht could never conceivably start or return on time.

It was true that it had an auxiliary engine—which wouldn't always start, either, and was once completely submerged by a misunderstanding on the part of a passenger about the little pump in the lavatory—but the least bit of wind or tide seemed to set this virtually at naught, and it could be exasperating to go slowly past one's own garden with the knowledge that one was still many hours from the possibility of disembarking. This led, presently, to a lot of dinghy-work, and paddling, so as to use the Nonesuch beach. But now, though one difficulty was modified, another had arisen. For if one embarked at Nonesuch, one might wait hours again—with sandwiches, thermos-flasks, bottles, rugs, overcoats, and binoculars—while the yacht was still beating slowly (if that is the right nautical expression) down Southampton Water. By the time it arrived, the sun had gone in, the wind had gone round, and everyone else had had lunch. Yachts, I concluded, were better in the background than as a method of getting nowhere in particular for no particular reason. This, of course, was a minority view on the Solent, where everyone yachted like mad. But of course, also, I was still very much impressed.

Back to London. And on Saturday, June 2nd, on the eve and in honour of my thirty-sixth birthday, we gave a rather special party at Church Street. It couldn't be large, for even with two tables in the dining-room we could only seat fourteen, but it was organized on a distinctly liberal scale. There was champagne. There were crackers—which take some finding at the beginning of June. There was a considerable collation. And there was a conjuror after dinner, who had probably never performed before so small an audience, but mystified it with immense success. Almost at the last moment the host and hero—I am alluding to myself—had had another idea, which was to get a professional photographer to come in and take a flash-light group, copies of which were afterwards distributed to all concerned. And the evening concluded with a buffet supper. The Wodehouses were there, and the Hopwoods; but not the Milnes, owing to their ineradicable habit of week-ending at their country cottage. And Peter Llewelyn Davies; and (among others) a cousin of Diana's, and a cousin of mine. I certainly enjoyed it all enormously myself, and so, I think, did the conjuror, for he went on conjuring even at the buffet supper. It was a decided occasion and splash, and did a

great deal, there can be no doubt, towards reconciling me to being thirty-six on Sunday morning. When I was an undergraduate, one of my sisters had married a man of this age, and I still remembered my secret astonishment at what had then seemed like a union between May and December. No question, either, that thirty-six is at least within sight of forty. But I know now that I wasn't really so very old then. Indeed, when I look at myself in that slightly blurred and startled group, I see, of course, that I was a mere thoughtless boy.

On June 13th Diana put some feathers on her head, and went off, again rather impressively, to present a bride, who was also a cousin, at one of Their Majesties' Courts. After she had been gone some time, I walked down the Mall, and had one more glimpse of her waiting, in a hired car, in the long queue. And then I went on to my Club, where Plum was dining with me again. This means that we were all well employed, for Plum and I talked shop until we were hoarse, and Diana (though suffering, I am afraid, from hay-fever to-night) has always been a singularly appreciative royal guest. She had explained to me that by going through certain formalities I might have been admitted to the background of her own party, too. But one of the formalities was knee-breeches, and though not exactly a republican, I still felt that—even if my stockings didn't fall down—I should look an awful fool. I was an author, not a courtier. But I was very proud of my wife.

A week-end with the Guedallas, at their odd quarters—a small cottage and a large laundry, which was now Philip's study—in Essex. Philip was an old friend, too, by now, for it had all started, eighteen years ago, at Balliol. He never changed. Even if he had thought out his jokes the night before, they were still pungent and he was still funny. Clever, industrious, kind-hearted creature. I still owe him a very great deal indeed.

Second week-end, at the end of the month, with the Milnes in Sussex. A much more decorative cottage, with slanting floors, and beams which the Milnes themselves seem able to avoid, but which have struck me many a stunning blow in my time. "Be careful," says a Milne. "Mind your head." "I'm all right," I say. "I haven't forgotten." And I haven't, what's more; but at the next moment, nevertheless, yet another beam has taken me unawares. I'm altogether too tall for this cottage, and my forehead has again been struck like a breakfast egg—if anyone should remember them now.

Nevertheless, once more, it's always fun to visit the Milnes, and though there was a refectory table in their country dining-room, too, we were all friends now, and it was quite unable to play the original trick.

Much Wimbledon tennis this summer, driving down in the American car, parking it in a field, and then sitting and twisting our heads to and fro on the benches of the Centre Court. I am so old, apparently, that my own memories go back to the earlier ground, by the side of the railway, with women players in hats and long skirts, with no car-park, and no necessity to start thinking about tickets many months in advance. One just paid, and walked in, and sat down, though there were infinitely fewer seats; and as for electric score-boards or broadcast commentaries, no one, in those days, had dreamt of either. Now the whole festival was beating Bayreuth, and nearly every afternoon the game was suddenly interrupted and we all stood up, because Royalty had arrived. I got tired of it first, I think, though Diana, and then the children, always went as long as they could. I couldn't catch up with the new stars, somehow, and the increasing gulf between this semi-professionalism and the kind of lawn-tennis that one might conceivably play oneself. 1928 was a good year, though, judging from Diana's entries. "Tilden beat Borotra." "Tilden beaten by Lacoste." And on the last Friday: "Lacoste beat Cochet."

On the Saturday, as I learn from the same source—so I suppose we were both there again—Miss Wills beat Señorita de Alvarez in the women's finals, and that evening (as both records reveal) we went up to Hampstead to dine with the Galsworthys. There, also, was kindness if you like. Always we shall remember the gentle, courteous J.G., with that quiet voice, and an emanation of goodness that could almost be physically felt. But it was a good dinner, too, for whatever he gave must be given thoroughly; and no one ever gave more. I used to tell Diana in those days that when all else failed I should only have to send him one brief, unconvincing begging letter, and our future would be assured. It would have been, what's more, for that was what he was like. Wise, but incomparably generous, with a head that always said "After you" to his great heart. I think we drove back from Hampstead that night with a good deal of glory still trailing behind us. Indeed, I know we did, for only at his other house in the country could the same atmosphere be found.

On the following Tuesday we took our poor Anne—six and a half now—to a Beaumont Street nursing-home, and left her there, with her own nurse as well as the trained staff in attendance, for what I should have considered a very alarming night. For in the morning her adenoids and tonsils were to come out, as we had been told was essential, and her parents, at any rate, went through a good deal of quaking qualms. Not Anne, though. She was enthralled by the break in nursery monotony; she slept well; she faced a bungling anæsthetist with immense courage; and though she was pretty uncomfortable for the next twenty-four hours, she still seemed perfectly happy, full of welcome self-importance—for this was the first time that Mary hadn't always done everything ahead of her—and ready to break all records in the consumption of ices. Indeed, she looked back on the whole experience with nothing but pride and pleasure, and I believe still counts it as one of the happiest weeks in her life. I hope this won't encourage the surgeons too much, but apparently six and a half is the right age for them; and as the expenses were virtually covered by what I had got for the third Trojan, one might call it a neat business, on the whole, all round. Well done, Anne.

Ten more days, and then once more I packed up my manuscripts and dictionaries—also a new bathing-suit and a yachting-cap—and again we all set forth for Nonesuch. The children's summer holiday, and presently, for I have been known to weaken in the month of August, my own holiday as well. Almost at once we rushed to the concrete bathing-house, and thence dashed into the sea. Nice, sandy bottom, except at very high tides, and seldom too rough for moderate swimmers like ourselves. Noticeably less buoyant and salty than the open coast, and there were days when one was surrounded by old grape-fruit skins and menus which had been cast overboard from the big liners. If it comes to that, I have seldom met a beach bearing a more constant crop of old boots. But what luxury to have it at the foot of one's own, or in this case one's father-in-law's, garden; so that one could change, if preferred, in a bedroom and still be only a couple of hundred yards from the sea. The general public still hadn't quite realized that the house was now occupied, and this summer they were still doing a good deal of undressing among the trees which went down to the shore. "Nosey!" shouted a member of the proletariat, when I inadvertently looked over the bank and saw some

mixed stripping. What monstrous impertinence! Not only was he a trespasser, but I had merely been taking the air as an authorized guest. I laughed; but at the same time my dignity was a little outraged. For there was something infectious about the soft air of the Solent, which turned even me, for the moment, into a moral millionaire.

One day, quite soon after our arrival, Diana and I were bathing, having left the two dogs to bask and blink on a dry towel. Happening to turn my head, I saw a small, round, dark object speeding towards me like a periscope. What on earth was it? I called to Diana. She saw it, too; and suddenly we were both splashing towards it as fast as we could. For the gallant Topsy, feeling an urge to join us, had run down the beach, and was continuing to run, though she was now many yards out at sea. That's how dogs swim, of course, and is one of the many ways in which they are so infinitely superior to man. But Pekes don't really like water, and it was a surprised as well as rather a breathless face that I eventually snatched from the deep. The poor little thing was as delighted that the experience was over as I was. I hurried ashore with it, dried it, and in a few more minutes it looked like a Peke again. What a brave girl, we thought, and how we praised her, though always with some kind words for the noble Rufus, too. This, however, was the first and last time that Topsy ever swam. The feat had been quite unintentional, and she had learnt a lesson that she didn't mean to forget. But I shouldn't forget it, either, and for a long time now my own swimming would always be conducted with one eye on a small figure that watched me, affectionately and a little anxiously, from the beach.

Another memory of Topsy this summer. In the evenings, when we sat in one of the rooms overlooking the paved terrace, with the windows wide open, we would put her out to snuffle around a bit by herself. In the twilight I saw her stop, and stand still, apparently fascinated by something on the paving-stones that I couldn't quite see. So I hopped out of the window myself, and there was my sweet Topsy, blowing gently at the hindquarters of an enormous toad. She looked up at me. "This is interesting," she said. I made ready to spring to the toad's assistance, but this was quite unnecessary; she didn't even want to make it hop. She only wanted to stand over it, maternally, until it chose to hop of its own accord. When it did

this, the simple game was over. But again she hadn't forgotten, and night after night—indeed, summer after summer—it was her treat to go out on this terrace, and find a toad, and do exactly the same thing. Curiously enough, I am devoted to toads myself, so that here was another powerful bond. Not that I want to bend down and puff at them. But Topsy did. And the toads didn't mind. And all, up to a point, was as in the Garden of Eden again.

Tennis with Diana, on the new hard court. Walks in the woods. Expeditions in the car. Watching the Cowes Regatta—but I am afraid I never understood what was happening, until I read about it in the newspaper next day. The last night of the same festival, with a glorious firework display. And every now and then another afternoon on the yacht. I put on my yachting-cap now, which I found rather hard and uncomfortable. For the benefit of those who have lacked my advantages, I might add that when you get close up to it a yachting-cap is exactly the same as that worn by a chauffeur; unless, that is to say, you are still further privileged to adorn it with a yacht club badge. I wasn't. But Diana took a photograph of me, clutching two spokes of the wheel, and I sent this (as a joke) to my American publishers—who immediately had it reproduced in the Press, together with a paragraph suggesting that my favourite relaxation was the same as Sir Thomas Lipton's. I hoped that nobody whom I knew would ever see this. But it was a fit punishment, perhaps, for the number of times when I had avoided supplying the same firm with any particulars of my romantic private life at all.

It was this summer, also, that the Wodehouses took a large furnished house, with a park, near Petersfield, and Diana and I, and the dogs, were over there more than once. A meeting, though not the first one, with Major Beith, as he then was, or Ian Hay, who was collaborating with Plum on a play. If only, I felt, as I always feel, I could ever achieve that charm; or could return that inexhaustible kindness. Now, also, I suddenly remember that George Blake was there; even more Scotch than Ian; at that time editing the *Strand*—so that I was always in slight awe of him—and not yet reabsorbed into his own country as a novelist, and journalist, and extremely skilful broadcaster.

But Plum, with a butler and a country mansion, was exactly the same as ever. No better dressed. Just as determined to talk about

nothing but ink. And just as adept at vanishing completely, whenever that sudden and mystical summons came.

On August 17th Diana and I left the children, in their cotton frocks and sunbonnets, and took the dogs up to London, where I am afraid we did rather an awful thing to Topsy. For that night we were to go on, by sleeping-car, to Edinburgh, where we were to be met and taken out by road to stay with friends at North Berwick. And if one dog in a sleeping-car is a problem, then two are a good deal more. It isn't—indeed it isn't—an ordinary night for them, so much as a day gone inexplicably wrong. They expect to be let out *en route*, and again one dog, on a strange platform, when one's wearing a dressing-gown, and when the train may set off again at any second, is quite enough responsibility by itself. So that for the first and last time poor Topsy was left behind. Well cared for, with the use of my parents-in-law's London house and garden, and a faithful attendant who was devoted to dogs. But we felt guilty as we set off with Rufus alone, and even though at midnight it became Diana's birthday, there were still pangs and regrets.

Salute to Charles and Effie Dalziel, for whom there must be a familiar adjective again. Kind. That's what they were and are. Yet I doubt, somehow, if either would wish this to be emphasized in print; so perhaps I'd better leave it that they did everything possible in the way of hospitality for a week, as well as a lot of other things that no one else would have dreamt of, and that Rufus, in addition to his master and mistress, felt all the better for the brisk Scotch air. By a remarkable coincidence the Dalziels' own dog was also called Rufus, though it was a Saluki and wasn't the least red. Every day it was taken out on the links, and every day—unless time has caused me to exaggerate this—it ran away and got lost. So that every day, also, there was a panic in the household, until it chose to reappear. Very unlike our own Rufus, and I'm afraid they didn't think very much of each other, these two representatives of the East. But they were both served with chicken at every meal. And that, whatever you say, was anything but a crime in 1928.

South in another sleeper. Rapture of Topsy, and of her owners, too. And off, by road once more, to stay with J. M. B. at one of his summer sessions at Stanway, in Gloucestershire. It was true that the dogs hadn't been invited, but it was a large house, they were perfectly happy now in each other's society, and again there was plenty



of food that could be taken to them after our own meals. So I don't think this other host minded, and for the rest it was all as I have since described it in his biography; so that even if you have missed that volume, I'm not going to describe it again. It was intensely idiosyncratic, as it must be with Barrie in charge. It was crammed with the double atmosphere of himself and that lovely background. And Cynthia Asquith and her family were there, of course; and the Galsworthys, and the A. P. Herberts, and Elizabeth Lucas, and Jack and Gerrie Llewelyn Davies, all of whom must yield to the same strange spell. For some reason I kept myself out of that biography, but in fact I had had the privilege of knowing Barrie since I was six or seven, and I'm not going to pretend that I didn't know him now. Nor that we don't miss him as much as ever. Nor that even two and a half years of digging into his life like a detective have left me with any less love for the most inimitable of all my friends.

Three crowded days, watching and listening to him again, and then on to more friends—Cynthia's sister Mary, and her husband, Tom Strickland—on the other side of Tewkesbury. A noteworthy point about Cynthia and Mary is that their grandparents, whom I well remember, were friends of my grandparents, and as I have now met Cynthia's grand-daughter, I am prepared to testify to the many admirable characteristics of no less than five generations in one family. But Diana has started a pretty good record with the Stricklands; for she only just missed knowing Tom's grandfather, and his children are our children's friends. Highly satisfactory. And three days at Apperley now, where there was no question of our dogs, as well as ourselves, being made to feel absolutely at home. Even the American car was given a much-needed wash and polish—this was just in the pre-chromium era—and then, almost at the end of August, I drove it through Cirencester, Malmesbury, Devizes, and Salisbury, to the New Forest, and Nonesuch once more. A smooth journey, on a perfect day.

Meanwhile, my father-in-law had been contemplating another purchase, and on the second of September it arrived. Diana certainly derives a large proportion of her love of animals from that quarter, and what her father had now seen and bought was a mother donkey with an infant son. Daphne and George. There was no intention of making either of them work. They were put in a large field, where a handsome shelter was at once erected.

owner began handing them carrots, bread, buns, and lumps of sugar as fast as he could. It was his princely pleasure to be approximately an hour late for lunch every day, but now we all knew where he was. He was standing by a wire fence, with a basket full of donkey provender, feeding that fortunate couple until even they whisked their ears and turned away. It was for this, perhaps, that he had rented the whole estate, and every holiday that he spent there was henceforth characterized by the same procedure. "I'm just," he would say, most superfluously, "going to feed my donkeys." They soothed and refreshed him. And presently, I shouldn't be at all surprised, his musings, accompanied by their munchings, would be reflected in another firm decision at a board-meeting.

My own holiday was definitely over, now that September was here, and again I toiled in a bedroom whatever the temperature outside. But the children still had another three weeks, and we only left them—as an advance-guard, and to see that the night-nursery had been properly papered and painted—just before the end. I notice a heavy entry of tips to the Nonesuch staff; but then look what a cheap summer we'd had. Two months in the country for our daughters, spent entirely with their grandparents. Once this had been a widespread custom; indeed, in my own childhood it had seemed the main object in grandparents' lives. But now that I was older, and had seen the custom collapsing, and knew what exceptional advantages our daughters had just enjoyed, did it mean that I was a minion?

An awkward question for all who suddenly find themselves as guests on the Solent. The only answer seemed to be to go on working harder than ever. And that I was still quite prepared to do.

Chelsea again, then. Long mornings in the study. Re-emergence in a rather dizzy and distant condition, and sometimes a bit late for lunch. *The Times* cross-word puzzle immediately afterwards, which shifted the strain and was an essential part of the day. Out, much oftener than not, with Diana and the dogs. Tea. Twilight. More work, if I hadn't done my quota, or if proofs were to be corrected. Dinner. Out quite a lot—we seem to have been considerable play-goers this autumn, as well as partakers, though also dispensers, of hospitality. And bed again, with last-minute instructions to the literary subconscious to come punctually to the surface in the morning. As it still generally did.

Yet best of all evening memories, perhaps, our times alone together, with the dogs sleeping, with a new library-book handy, with a piano to strum on, with the gramophone to dance to—until the children began coming down, and I feared to lose the last remnants of their respect, I used frequently to dance round the drawing-room by myself, for this also seemed to aid the subconscious—and with the conviction, behind my own front door, that I couldn't be a minion if I tried. "Dogs!" They both raise their heads. "Out!" Out they go, and that's the cosy end of it. Never cosier than when autumn again returns.

But then, of course, came the autumn colds as well. The children started them this year, and it was touch and go whether Diana could accompany her father on one of his business trips to Paris. She got off, though, I'm glad to say, for she was as mad about Paris as any American, and business wouldn't seem to have occupied all the time. Back, after three nights, to find me coughing and sneezing, though still producing my twelve hundred words. Her rare absences always meant that at least one dog must share my bed, and it is strange how hard a sleeping Peke can push. Diana doesn't seem to mind this, and she has certainly had time to get used to it. But when I find myself being shoved first one way, and then (as I lift the Peke over my legs) the other, I do sometimes get a glimmering of what people mean when they say that dogs should sleep in baskets. However, our dogs wouldn't; so there it was. I can't make it clearer than that.

Hullo—here we are taking Dot out to dinner at the Savoy. I'd forgotten that, but it sounds rather dashing, and I bet we all had fun. A Saturday night, too, so that the literary subconscious could chase itself, for I have hardly ever expected it to do anything on Sundays. And here, at the beginning of November—with Topsy now in her second year with us—is another theatrical note. "Stella to tea."

That means Mrs. Patrick Campbell. She had been my parents' friend as long ago as I can remember anything at all. Or from the days when we lived just out of Kensington Square—but the Committee was kind, and let us have a key—and she was still at Number 33. Even then, as was natural enough, I found her compelling and romantic, though I didn't appreciate her *griffon*. She also went on treating me with special affection, through thick and thin—and both were involved—all the time that I was growing up;

and when I did grow up; and again after that. Moreover, though naturally mischievous and dangerously critical, she had extended this affection to Diana at once; even to the point of telling her that she was too good for me, and even though this was the case. When we were in Walpole Street, she was living a few hundred yards away in Tedworth Square, and was writing her autobiography. I admit that we suffered from this sometimes, for she used to come in night after night, ask for a cigar, and then read us the same passages over and over again. She seemed to think that I could help her with the *mot juste*, but she was indignant if I ever suggested it, and scorned my painful attempts. Nevertheless, the affection was still there, on all three sides, and we always missed her when she, too, vanished to America.

Now, in the last London phase, she was living on the first floor of a big house in Pont Street, with memories for me of so many objects that had once been in Kensington Square. And at the beginning of November, as I have said, she came to tea. Flattery for both of us—for that was the system, if you were lucky enough to avoid the other mood; flattery for the children; and flattery, of course, for the dogs. She was Peke-mad herself, by this time, and as you know, it was this that finally kept her out of England—because of the quarantine laws—for good. And she always boomed the same story at me. "Look at Denis! When I first knew him, he *hated* dogs. And when Mary was born, he said he couldn't have a dog in the house, because its hair would come off and choke her. So poor Diana's dog had to be *squashed* before he came to his senses; and now just look at him with two Pekes on his lap!"

Had I said that? I can't remember it, but I was never spared this customary reminder. Well, I owe Stella Campbell a great deal, too. She helped me, and occasionally she tormented me; but I always knew, even if it were for my parents' and grandparents' sake, that she was firmly on my side. She was sixty-three now; it was a long time since she had had to pad her dresses so as not to appear like a wraith on the stage; and it was a long time, also—for there was hardly a management with whom she had avoided disputes—since there had been any security for her in that career. We all knew, again, that she could have saved little or nothing. But her thick hair was as black as ever, her movements were regal, her wit was still swift and inimitable, and her courage was utterly undimmed. There

was to be one more triumph, after a long gap, in London, and then one would only hear of her in New York, or Hollywood, or later still in Paris, or at the end in the South of France. My own age was reckoned in months, and Diana wasn't born, when she first shot to the heights in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. I never saw her Mélisande, and indeed, for plays were rare treats in my own earlier days, she was forty-six before I saw her act at all. To me, then, she was herself—whatever that was—far more than a famous actress, and I don't think of her now in theatres nearly so much as in houses, or restaurants, or hotels. Always her own worst enemy, as they say, and one of our truest friends. Soon, because of a dog that she loved, she will have gone out of my own story. But she was never far from the foreground in all the best years of it, and she gave me many other friendships, too. Peace, I trust, for the most restless of all spirits, so far away from a world at war.

The children's half-term holiday again. Diana took them to Maskelyne's—but none of them went up on the stage—and at the end of the same week (yes, I thought her reappearance was due) we took little Dorothy and Mary to a *matinée* of *The Squeaker*. At the end of the month we set off, with the Milnes, for the Society of Authors' Annual Dinner—this year at the Hyde Park Hotel—where Barrie, who had become President last March, was to make the main speech. I have written of this, also, though again I didn't say that I was there. But I was, and in that company, and we were all spell-bound and entranced. What a performer, then and always. Only one, veiled glance for the Milnes and Mackails, though, and on this sort of occasion one could hardly have expected more. On the other hand, as I myself glanced at the serried authors and authoresses, I was again struck, and rather depressed, by the general colourlessness of their appearance. I wondered, once more, whether all assembled professions looked like this. I wondered whether intelligence, for of course it was there, must invariably emit so pale a gleam. I was critical, too, I'm afraid. I wanted to feel that we were all bearing a very special torch; and if I couldn't feel this glow, did it mean that I was an amateur at heart?

Perhaps I was. I have said enough by this time, surely, to show that I have considered a number of individual authors the very salt of the earth. But I couldn't talk shop with any of them—except, and

that was never the least like ordinary shop, with Plum. Oughtn't I to discuss technique? Oughtn't I to tell them my own literary plans, and make some sort of attempt to listen to theirs? Oughtn't I, perhaps, to have been a reviewer? I was uneasy. Not during the President's speech, which was as rich an experience as even I had hoped. But before and afterwards I had the strangest feeling that I was here under false pretences, and that with all my industry I was the loneliest author in the world.

Should I ask Alan Milne how *he* felt? No; if I once gave the show away, he, too, I thought, might turn on me and have me drummed out. Yes, it's a queer profession, and never queerer than when one suddenly sees it sitting in rows at long tables, and catches a glimpse of the utter absurdity of its forming itself into a Society at all. However, I'm still a member. If I resigned, I should have to give a reason, and I couldn't possibly do that. No doubt, also, that other authors looked at me that evening, and thought me hideous and half-witted. They may have put a better face on it, in one sense—for Diana tells me that no one has ever been worse than I am at concealing my inner thoughts—but the truth was, I dare say, that every one of them was in fact struggling with a solitary story of his own. So perhaps—I should like to believe it—I'm not really an amateur, after all.

December now. The children's party again at their maternal grandparents' house. Punch and Judy—which my own maternal grandparents had provided for me more than thirty years ago. A bran pie. Dancing. And what Diana's entry describes as "ices, etc." She also notes that forty-six guests attended; of whom some are in uniform now, while others have children of their own. My personal contribution, as usual, was to stand about and look as benevolent as I could. Also to try and recognize mothers and fathers who weren't always quite sure of my own identity. Or, like Jacques, to be sad and say nothing, because of all the thoughts that children's parties bring. But how I admired Diana, and how nobly she kept everything going. "Good-bye and thank you so much," the guests were saying now, as they bore their booty away. A quiet evening by our own fireside, while again I attempted to find out who some of those other parents were.

Plum dining at my more venerable Club again. Plays—two nights running, I see—with Dot as our sympathetic companion. Dinner



MARY, 1928





with the Guedallas. Dinner with the Milnes. A visit to the first talkie that I ever saw and heard; Al Jolson in *The Singing Fool*. And then, on the shortest day of the year, all down to Nonesuch again for Christmas. Diana filling stockings like anything. Diana piling up parcels. Diana—again I abase myself—telling me to write Christmas messages on labels, though I didn't always know what was hidden by the paper and string. And then down came the children, from the night nursery over our bedroom, to wrench and pull, and to show us what their stockings had already disgorged. More parcels in the dining-room at breakfast. Turkey and plum-pudding at lunch. The richest of decorated cakes at tea. Spots before my own eyes now, I'm pretty certain, and again—for I couldn't help this, even at thirty-six—a deep melancholy catching me by the heart and throat. I couldn't escape it. Sooner or later Christmas always does this to me. Suddenly the whole thing becomes quite unbearable, though even if I were given three magic wishes, I couldn't tell you what one of them would be. I just drop into the depths and stay there. I can't even remember that it is almost bound to pass.

I suppose it did, though, as so far it always has. Yet this was the Christmas when Mary sat up for dinner, when she suddenly rose on her chair and began delivering a brilliant speech, and then—just as abruptly—stopped, and burst into a flood of tears. How deeply I felt for her. But it was Diana who must take her away and try to calm her. For fathers are always useless in moments of emotion. It is part of their tragic fate.

On New Year's Eve we all returned to Church Street, and Diana and I went out to a Chelsea party, so that again I was awake when all the whistles and hooters blew. And that was the end of 1928.

A crowded year, even in this rapid record. A happy year on the surface, and indeed, but for whatever it is that has always returned to weigh on my spirits, many reasons for genuine happiness, too. Plenty of friends. No serious illness. A new car. Much hospitality in the country, and a comfortable, well-planned home of my own. No sign, either in the diaries or my memory, of any anxiety about world politics or public affairs. Should there have been? But I wasn't shirking my own responsibilities, and it wasn't everyone's duty, surely, to offer advice to the Government as well. I had the idea then, and kept it for a long time, that if I paid my taxes promptly—and I have usually paid them even before they are due—

then the authorities, who had access to information which I inevitably lacked, could be more or less trusted to run things for the ultimate benefit of us all. I was quite wrong, of course. Yet even now, when I know I was wrong, I still don't see what else an ordinary citizen could do. I was guarding the unit of my own family. None of us were breaking any written or even unwritten laws. It didn't and still doesn't seem wrong to me that some should be luckier than others, or that everyone isn't in exactly the same social and financial position as everyone else. I couldn't have created a world myself in which everything was as flat and colourless as that, and I couldn't believe that this had ever been part of the Plan. I knew there was plenty of injustice, but there was plenty of quite invincible justice, too. I might, of course, have been a cripple in a workhouse ward; but I wasn't, so far; it would have done no one any good if I had been; and meanwhile part of the pattern must surely be made up by authors, with a wife and two daughters, who were writing stories and books.

That was the vague and innocent philosophy. And in 1928, as another notebook tells me, I hadn't only written a very innocent novel called *Another Part of the Wood*—portions of which I can still actually bring myself to read—but twenty-seven of my six-thousand-word stories as well; twelve of which would ultimately appear, two years later, as a volume called *The Young Livingstones*. I had also written a children's story for a Christmas annual, a few articles, and had got five guineas from the editor of the *Strand*—what a gentleman he was to pay me at all!—for contributing to a symposium on What I Should Like Best to Write. From the highest literary point of view all this output may or may not have been commendable or even worth while. But at least there wasn't a word in it—not that I found the slightest difficulty in this—that could have brought a blush to the hypothetical maiden's cheek. And at least no one could say that I had been idle.

### CHAPTER III

1929

By 1929, Topsy had certainly invented her favourite game with me. It began very quietly, with a kind of thought-transference; for I

would be sitting reading in a chair, when I suddenly felt that I must raise my eyes. There had been no sound, but I was quite right. Topsy was now lying on her back, on another arm-chair—no rules against this in the Mackail household, for they would have been quite useless with Pokes—gazing at me steadfastly from her benign brown eyes. I knew just what I was supposed to do then. I had to start growling—gently at first, but with a slight crescendo—and at the end of the growl I had to say “Wuff!” At the first murmur a look of rapture would pass over Topsy’s inverted features; and at the “Wuff!” she would give a violent, convulsive movement—still on her back—which would sometimes throw her right across the chair. Or, as a slight variant, she would roll on to her feet, tuck her head into a corner, and—still managing to eye me—would butt in much the same manner as she had previously kicked.

This wasn’t the end of the game, but it was the end of the variations. I continued to growl and say “Wuff!”, and Topsy continued to react in one way or the other; until quite suddenly there was a Wuff that produced no reaction at all. She was sitting up and looking at me with mild though still friendly surprise. “Poor old fellow,” she seemed to be saying. “A pity he’s so childish in some ways.”

“Topsy!” I would say accusingly. “You *know* you started it!”

She just blinked at me, though there was a slight flutter from the end of her tail.

“Oh, all right,” I said. “I shan’t play next time.”

But of course I always did. I had to, when that silent summons came. Besides, I was getting so remarkably good at growling.

This year sets off with the author getting to work on a very long novel that was to be called *The Square Circle*, and with the rest of the family taking temporarily to the stage. Diana, that’s to say, only took to it as a theatrical duenna; but Mary and Anne were rehearsing, under professional direction, on real boards at a real playhouse, in preparation for a special revival of *The Young Visitors* by the children of real stars. For a Cause, of course. And if you point out that neither of their parents had stellar qualifications, you are of course perfectly correct. Nevertheless, Mrs. Geoffrey Whitworth had roped our offspring in, both were to appear in the grand finale—representing Miss Ethel Monticue’s wedding—and Anne had actually

been given a line to speak. At the right moment she was to say "Hear, hear."

The greatest possible fun for them both, and very sweet they would look, in their ridiculous grown-up dresses. Also there was a friend, in a very important position, in the cast; for it was little Dorothy who was playing Ethel, for the second year in succession. I attended the dress-rehearsal and the first and only performance, and thoroughly enjoyed both. Couldn't say that my own couple displayed outstanding talent, and should probably have been rather alarmed if they had. But little Dorothy looked ravishing, spoke up, held the whole stage, and filled me with hopeful pride. We had known her just over four years now; and by this time I knew something else as well. That in one way, at any rate, she was exactly like her mother. For nothing could ever turn either of their heads.

So we wondered what would happen when she grew up and left school. But though I naturally speculated about my own children also, I didn't feel, somehow, that they were going to be actresses; and this again, from my own point of view, was just as it should be. They had their fun, in dressing up and hearing applause, and then they were children on holiday once more. Going to the dentist, I see. Being taken to another play. And on Saturday, January 12th, celebrating Anne's seventh birthday by lunching with their grandfather at Claridge's and then having a small party in their own home. Their parents present at both occasions. "Egg party," I have written down in my account-book; but with no reference to Easter, which was indeed three months away; merely as a succinct manner of alluding to the immaturity of the guests.

Back to school just five days later—I notice that the bill seems to have gone up a good deal—and on the same evening their parents dined with my cousin Diana and her husband; which is quite easy to make less confusing, because she is always called Di. This was the one who had come to my birthday party, whom I had known since we were both in our respective nurseries, and with whom I have never had an argument yet. She thinks I'm funny, bless her—which of course immediately makes me as funny as I can manage to be—and I'm just as fond of her as if we weren't even distantly connected, which is an abominable way of putting it, but possibly conveys a little of what I mean. On such evenings as this we immediately repaired to the piano after dinner, and played duets

together, regardless of the neighbours and everything else. Not Bach. And not improvisations. And not from any music that had been written for four hands. But we each had a vast selection of popular songs and dances, and with me taking the bass—and generally hogging the pedals—and Di performing brilliantly to the right of the keyhole, we set up some prodigious rhythmical noises to our great satisfaction and with no complaints from her husband or my wife.

They took it very well, indeed, as we elaborated and thumped. I think my own sight-reading was a little better, but Di is actually much more musical, and in any case we were a very loud and melodious team. Sometimes I sang, too, though I have never really had what anyone could call a voice since it broke and I left my school choir. Yet in the days of my youth and versatility I was something of a librettist and composer, and even yet I hadn't quite forgotten the words and music of such items as *Comely Miss Cholmondeley* or *If You Wait for the Men to Propose*. I couldn't sing them now, if I were offered a fortune; just as it is a long time, also, since Di and I last thumped a keyboard side by side. But I know that we were still doing it, with a good deal of personal enjoyment, at the beginning of 1929.

Almost innumerable references to the Wodehouses all this winter and early spring. We were constantly going there—they were in Norfolk Street, at the back of Park Lane, now—and they were constantly coming to us. Or Plum and I would be off on our own somewhere, until the usual moment when I suddenly found that I was walking along the street by myself. He was soaring now. He hardly needed to touch the musical plays, for which his skilful lyrics had once kept the pot rather more than boiling, for almost everything that he wrote was first serialized in two countries and then rushed by eager publishers into another book. His strange world—which if it ever existed at all must have passed away before the first great war—struck no one, apparently, as out of date; while his amazing and entirely individual gift of language was lapped up not only by magazine-readers but by the loftiest highbrows in every land. Something here, it would seem, for everyone, in the way of amusement and admiration, as he tapped away on the almost primeval type-writer from which nothing would separate him; and did this in a bedroom, because he felt easier there than in the glorious, book-lined, panelled study which his wife had provided for him on a lower floor.

It was in this room that he talked and relaxed, and polished his spectacles, and beamed, and was covered with Pekes. I can still see it, and can still hear him beginning again: "I say, with regard to this business of plots . . ." But I don't know who, if anyone, is living in that house now. I don't, at the moment of writing, even know where the Wodehouses are.

Early in February there was another of our sybaritic evenings with the Hopwoods, but it was a special and even slightly sombre occasion as well. For a week later we saw them off, from Waterloo, on the first stage of the long voyage to South America, where Frank had business to do, and we knew that it must be months before we were all dining and laughing together again. The train pulled out, and their children had grandparents, also, who, as we knew, would do their best to spoil them all the time that Frank and Audrey were away. And Diana, of course, was going to do whatever she could. But I don't like partings. I like to have all my friends safely settled where I can get at them. And though in my day I have been as far as Norway, South Africa, Switzerland, and the United States, I have always detested travelling myself, and always choke—even on an Underground platform—when I wave at a departing train. Sensitive, I suppose. Or stupid, or something. But it's all right about the Hopwoods, really, and they'll be back by the summer, to our great pleasure and the joy of their Peke.

Which reminds me that it was just about now that Topsy was photographed again—professionally, I mean, for I was always photographing both dogs myself—and this is how it came about. When you're an author, a regular and persistent feature of your correspondence (I am alluding to the periods between wars) consists of requests to record your visage through a lens. No charge will be made, you are informed, and many of the artists offer you a complimentary copy for nothing. Why? I have already had something to say about authors' faces, but even if they were all like Venus and Adonis, there aren't enough periodicals in which to exhibit them to the extent which the photographers seem to hope. For once they get you in the studio they think nothing of exposing a dozen plates ("Just one more, I think—leaning over the back of the chair"), and I can assure you, in my own case, that I could have accepted one of these invitations at least once a month.

Being good-natured and having no wish to drive them to ruin, my own impulse was always to make some sort of excuse. Diana, on the other hand, not only thought this discourteous, but appeared quite insatiable in the matter of complimentary copies—even though they all went into the bottom of a large chest. "You can't be so ungrateful," she would say. Or: "You mustn't be so rude." Every now and then, therefore, I weakened, made an appointment, let myself be twisted about under blinding lights, and eventually received the portrait of a haggard and haunted-looking stranger. If it also appeared in the Press, I never seemed to see it, and sometimes I went as far as warning the photographer that it never would or could. But they were idealists. Money, apparently, meant nothing to them. And in a few months the same firm would be writing to me in just the same way again.

So in the midst of one of these familiar arguments with Diana, I suddenly said that I would go, this time, if I could take Topsy.

"They haven't asked her," said Diana.

"They've got to have her," I said.

"You can't treat them like that," said Diana.

"Topsy or nothing," I said.

"But what if she's frightened?"

"She won't be," I said. And she wasn't. The photographer seemed a little puzzled, when two sitters arrived in his studio, but I was both firm and off-hand, and we faced the camera together. When the proofs arrived, it could be seen not only that Topsy had been perfectly calm and free from self-consciousness, but—for the first time on record—that I was capable of something like a faint smile. For once, also, an idealist was rewarded, for the portrait was reproduced in more than one medium and we also bought a number of copies ourselves. If I ever finish this story, I am hoping to make them use it as a frontispiece; but in any case it shows the eager, gentle Topsy in her prime. She would be visiting one more studio later on, and this time not with her master. And I should still occasionally be haled off to studios without her. But this was the only sitting that the master ever enjoyed, and the impulse that made him bring that special companion is one that he will never regret.

I see that we opened what might be called the spring motoring season this year by a Saturday outing to another Surrey hotel. We

have been there three times altogether; first when it wasn't an hotel at all, but the residence of an amateur playwright who had dramatized one of my early novels, had got up a local performance of it, and had asked us back to supper; secondly on this Saturday in March, 1929; and thirdly, after an appalling night of bombs in Chelsea, when we suddenly beat it and stopped at the first place that would take us in. An odd aggregation of memories. Odder still, if I could have looked forward that first time, or could conceivably have guessed the manner of our return. Lucky that I couldn't, perhaps; and the second visit, though expensive, was pleasant enough. Long before the bombs came back, it would have been virtually impossible to get me to drive through the suburbs on a Saturday afternoon or Sunday, for I still placed some value on our lives. But in 1929 the great tide of week-end motorists was far from its ultimate height, and the Great West Road could still, with a little imagination, be regarded as a by-pass. Yet the tide was rising, not only at week-ends. Already Church Street, which had been so quiet when we first came there that a tame goose used to wander about its lower reaches, was also becoming something of an artery, and one no longer dreamt of strolling carelessly across the King's Road.

In the evening rush-hour, which was when I generally bought my evening paper from a faithful character on the other side, I often had to wait quite a while now, before it was safe to make a dash. So that a thought came to me on one occasion, and I put it into action at once. In other words, I sat down at my typewriter, and wrote to the Borough Council, suggesting that they should place an island refuge at this point. What was my pride and astonishment when they did this within a week; and though I rather suspect now that they were going to do it anyhow, I have always felt that this island should be called after me. Some years later I tried the same kind of thing again, and another island was instantly placed at the King's Road end of Sydney Street, which by this time had become pretty dangerous, too. Encouraged by these civic successes, I wrote a third time, to point out that the new green paint on the lamp-posts wasn't nearly such a good colour as the old. This was quite true. A dark, olive shade had crept into it; but unfortunately it was repeated and has remained. The Borough Fathers, it would seem, were less impressionable in this direction than I had hoped; and the two



anonymous islands are the only visible memorial to a ratepayer whom they possibly regarded as a bit of a pest.

But for whom Chelsea, so shattered and battered now, will always be his true, spiritual home. . . .

March 10th. Disgraceful episode of our visit to a Sunday evening performance, by the company that were to take it out to America, of *Journey's End*. Not that there is the least reflection on Diana, who behaved perfectly throughout. But what happened was that we were dining with some people whom we didn't know very well; that we were suddenly informed that they were taking us on to this entertainment; and that shortly after the curtain had risen on the second Act, it suddenly came over me that I should go mad if I continued to suffer such mental and emotional torment for another second. A tribute, of course, to the author—though luckily for him other people seemed more than ready to sit through the horrors that he had provided, and indeed to return again and again.

But I couldn't bear them. The approach of death in a dug-out, with all this skilful actuality, was no entertainment for me. Suddenly I fled from my seat. I went to a club, and remained there, with one weight on my soul and another on my social conscience, until the moment came when I forced myself back to the door of the theatre again. For though Diana would have guessed what had happened, and would even forgive me, of course I must take her home with me, and of course I must say something—perhaps about having a fit—to my well-intentioned hosts. As I entered the foyer, I saw an old acquaintance, from my early theatrical days, and he recognized me almost at once.

"Hullo," he said. "What are you up to?"

"Well," I said, "to tell the honest truth, I'm supposed to be in front here. But"—I shuddered again—"I couldn't stand it. I came out. And what are you doing?"

"I'm the manager," he said. "I'm going to New York with the show. But," he added, "I can't stand seeing it any more than you can."

I nearly fell on his neck. He had become a major since our past association, and he might have laughed at me or snubbed me. But he didn't; and his surprising confession had revealed that I wasn't necessarily a pariah, after all. We had it all out, and I was quite

calm again by the time that the audience emerged. And Diana forgave me. And I made my peace with our hosts. And my old acquaintance went off to America, where he was in charge of no less than five companies of *Journey's End* before this other tide at last began to recede. Queer sidelight on his very queer profession. Laugh, Clown, Laugh, as you might say. Though I still can't make out what it was in human nature that made the play run in London for all but six hundred nights. Did they *like* pretending that there was a war on again? Well, if they did, they were already more than half-way through the impatient and uneasy years of peace.

Nice chap, Sherriff, though. I should be the last person, and it would be very unfair indeed, to think of blaming him.

On the following Saturday we took little Dorothy out to lunch, and to see Douglas Fairbanks in *The Man in the Iron Mask*. I was quite civilized this time. I didn't dream of leaving my seat. And on the Thursday after that I observe that we dined with J. M. B. Self-invited, no doubt, for that was the fixed system, on which he always insisted; but why I mention it this time—for I have passed over a string of dinners, and lunches, and teas—was that Diana was now fairly inside the magic circle, too. I couldn't have drawn her there, much as I had wished to, but the Stanway visits and our own little dinner-parties had done it, and now it was a further official instruction that she must be the other guest. So we set off together, nearly always, henceforth, and supported each other when we struck one of the dark moods. But they were also much rarer from now on, for the host could almost always make an extra effort with female society in the flat. While once he had made it, it would be bad luck indeed if there were any further relapse. See, if you feel like it, the opening pages of my Biography for the kind of evenings that we had. But I shouldn't forget them, and neither would Diana, though I had never attempted to crystallize them in ink. There was nothing like them; and she was as truly fond of him and devoted to him as I was.

The Boat Race again, and again a welcome invitation from the Herberts. Again I am greeted, from the midst of a mass of his friends of all categories and ages, by Alan Herbert in the hall. "Aha!" he says. "You're one for the roof, aren't you? Up you go!"

He is a character, as I need hardly remind you, with considerable personality, and once more I have set off without time to think. Right up the stairs, up a steep ladder through a trap-door, and out on to a narrow strip of leads with a parapet (at any rate as I still see it, and virtually begin trembling again) not more than a foot high. Far, far below are the heads of other guests in the garden, but all I am thinking of now is whether I shall throw myself over the parapet or just wait till I fall naturally. My head is swimming, I can't speak, and as my past life rushes giddily before me, I recall how I found myself in exactly the same situation last year. A pity that this should be the end of an interesting and quite promising career. My poor wife and children—I wish I could send them some farewell message, but as I have just had to cut a very old friend (for if I spoke to him, I should pitch straight over the brink), there seems little chance of fulfilling this final wish. How on *earth* could I have forgotten, and have been snared by those same hospitable words again?

However, I have traces of personality, too. Slowly, cautiously, and backing inch by inch, I make my way towards the ladder again. For what seems like an hour, I feel for the top rung with my foot. I am descending. There is a great roaring in my ears, but I have tottered into someone's bedroom, and gradually a few faculties return. In fact, I am presently in a condition to be told, by some kindly stranger, that the Boat Race is all over, and that Cambridge—as it always did in those days—has again won. I then find Diana and the children, we all thank the Herberts heartily, pick up the car again, and make our way home. Strange, I reflect, that when I was a child myself, I was always climbing about on roofs, and actually preferred walking along the tops of garden walls. How one changes, to be sure, as the years go by. Yet not, it would seem, in the matter of remembering this particular ordeal from one Boat-Race party at the Herberts' to the next. For in another twelve months this exact chain of incidents will be taking place again.

Mary's tenth birthday, on March 28th. We took her to the evening performance of *Mr. Cinders* at the Adelphi Theatre—not yet rebuilt, with all its curves straightened, and darkened by the new *décor*—and I seem to have given her a juvenile typewriter as well. She has employed it already to thank me, in a brief note, for the “perfectly lovely typewriter”; and this falls out of the account-book now, and

for a moment closes up the years. A highly successful evening. Nine and ninepence for taxis and programmes, for we were doing it all in style. And next day, which was Good Friday, down to Nonesuch again, for a short Easter recess.

That brings us to April, and so back, quite early in the month, to Church Street. It seems, in fact, as though for once we had managed to get through this dangerous season without having builders in the house. I am writing short stories again—nine between March and May—for *The Square Circle* can't possibly be finished in one spurt. May 18th. Rufus's ninth birthday. Of course we remember it, and we look at him, and we look back; and he hasn't fainted again, but one can't pretend that he isn't getting older, and slower, or that any of us is looking forward, for his sake, to the hot months that are to come. Why can't they be like parrots? Why, when they spend such long hours in sleeping, must it all be crowded into a few short years? Why, at these moments of sadness and terror, does one ever have dogs at all?

But he still has his appetite. He still licks both plates. He still comes with us to Battersea Park, and Burton Court, or the grounds—which will be closed again, in another day or two, for the Chelsea Flower Show—between the Royal Hospital and the river. Topsy runs, and Rufus walks. But he is still with us; and we try not to think too much about anything but the present and the past.

On May 30th there was a General Election. Diana and I went round to the Council School in Park Walk, were set on by enthusiasts who seemed to think that we still hadn't made up our minds, and again cast our votes for Sir Samuel Hoare. Diana again tried to take her ballot-paper away with her—which of course made me feel very superior—and we left another female constituent, I remember, still arguing with the officials because she wanted to vote for the King. Nevertheless, Sir Samuel was of course returned, because until he was taken away from it Chelsea would have no one else; though as we spent the evening listening to the other results, it became obvious that the Conservative Government was in temporary eclipse. As a matter of fact, no party was left with a clear majority; which was all right in a way, if it meant that nothing was going to happen. From this point of view, indeed, Conservative principles might be said to have won the day. Am I still disrespectful to Democracy?

Not at all. It can hardly be said to have been consulted or concerned. But in any case we had again done all that we could, or all that the Constitution allowed.

So then June 3rd was my birthday once more, with a revival or second edition of the great party of last year. This time, as it was a Monday, the Milnes were able to join us, and we followed much the same procedure as before. White ties, that's to say, champagne, crackers, and the same conjuror—who had promised to do different tricks, but didn't. This time, however, there was no flashlight photograph—partly, I think, because of an absence of thanks for the copies that I had distributed last time; but on the other hand there were printed menus, though the banquet was actually of the simplest,\* decorated with a reduced version of that photograph of Topsy and myself. No one was expected to thank me for these, and perhaps it was rather a conceited or vainglorious thing to do. Yet again it

#### \*MENU

(or however you pronounce it.)\*

---

Grape Fruit

(but plenty of Maraschino, too.)

---

Some kind of Cold Soup

(and when we say that, it's *meant* to be cold.)

---

Salmon Mayonnaise

(Jolly good, when it comes off.)

---

Cutlets in Aspic

(Please save your bones for the dogs.)  
Les Pommes Nouvelles. Les Petits Pois.

---

An Ice

(If it hasn't melted.)

---

\* N.B.—As we have to go to press some days in advance, this Menu (or however you pronounce it) is subject to alteration without notice.

was a little disappointing that more than half of these almost priceless souvenirs were left behind.

However, I can't say that the host didn't enjoy himself, even though he was now thirty-seven. He was affable and gracious. He was well-dressed—with a floral buttonhole in addition to everything else. He was still completely flummoxed by the conjuror's legerdemain, even at this second opportunity of detecting any weaknesses or flaws. He was fond of his guests. He was proud of his house and all that had been done for it. He had by no means forgotten his children or Pokes upstairs. Yet I know what he was thinking, too. Had he deserved all this? How long could it last? Was it all going to be snatched away? And—nearer and more oppressive still—how was he to get round that next awkward corner in *The Square Circle*? Was an evening like this going to make his work any easier in the morning? What about those stories for which the editors were still waiting? Suppose he suddenly ran right out of ideas. Suppose this and that and everything else all suddenly cracked under him. It might. Indeed, it was almost bound to. What in the world had induced him, with all these responsibilities on his shoulders, to go and give a prodigal party like this?

He then smiled again, stamped on his methodist and presbyterian ancestors, or whatever it was that wouldn't even allow him a care-free evening on his birthday, and was once more his own charming and only slightly alarming self. Supper; and the conjuror again obliging with more tricks in the dining-room. (By the way, I discovered, long afterwards, that he lived a double life, and had another name and was a schoolmaster by day. Cagliostro could hardly have beaten that.) Guests getting into cars and taxis. The host still hospitable on the door-step. The host closing his front door for the last time.

No, of course not. The host rushing upstairs, releasing the dogs, and accompanying them and his wife at least half-way round the block. "It went off all right, don't you think?" "Oh, I'm sure it did." "Well, I hope it did. Rufus! Topsy! Come along in, now!" And so to bed.

Two of the guests, though I still didn't know it, had a trick of their own up their respective sleeves. Hob-nobbing at a Club to which they both belonged, Messrs. A. A. Milne and P. G. Wodehouse had secretly decided that I should belong to it, too. So Alan had

proposed, Plum had seconded, and as I was neither so famous as to arouse enmity nor so utterly unknown as to be rejected on these grounds, the Committee had approved my candidature almost at once. Alan broke the news to me a few days after the party, and though touched, flattered, and grateful, I am afraid that for a moment I was also slightly taken aback.

Here is the reason, together with some of the strange story of my career as a Clubman. When I was really very young indeed, my uncle, who was probably the most generous character on earth, suddenly told me that if I wanted to join a Club, he would see that I was put up and would also pay my first year's subscription and entrance-fee. I knew that this was extraordinarily kind of him. I knew also that he combined generosity with an almost equal talent for being bitterly offended at the faintest hint of a rebuff. I very much doubted if I could ever pay any further subscriptions myself, I was quite content to be clubless, and there was also a distinct impression that I was rash and extravagant on the part of my parents at home. Such, however, was the terror of provoking my uncle, that I immediately accepted his offer, and in the hope of being tactful selected his own Club, which was also the only one about which I knew anything at all.

Perhaps it will be made manifest at a later stage why my profession, like his, was entered as "artist." In any case, it was a considerable relief to me when I learnt, from another source, that it would probably be five or six years before I heard anything more. This, however, was counting without his passionately impetuous spirit, and unquestionable skill at getting everything he wanted—even though he seldom wanted anything that he'd got. In short, he pulled wires and stampeded the Committee to such effect, that barely a year elapsed before I found myself a member of what I shall now call Club A. I hardly knew any of the other members, except my uncle, and must have been rather a disappointment in the matter of expenditure, for all I did was to use the stationery and read the picture-papers, or occasionally wash my hands. Nevertheless, I had certainly acquired a new standard of living, and never dreamt of giving it up.

Meanwhile, however, my father—not to be outdone, though actually thinking far more of the future than the present—had proposed me as a candidate for the much more distinguished establishment to which he belonged. In this case, indeed, it was expected to

be something much more like a quarter of a century before the next stage; but now we were counting without the first world-war. Not that it reduced the existing membership, among which, I suppose, the average age was then about sixty. But it played such havoc with the waiting-list that only a few years after the war was over I was faced with an unexpected ultimatum. I wasn't only coming up for election at once, but the Committee had been forced to suspend the old custom by which nervous or impoverished candidates could go back to the bottom of the list. I must either be elected (or black-balled) now, or for ever after hold my peace.

Well, I had been quite looking forward to an old age at Club B (as I shall now call it), and had no wish to lose this opportunity for good. Neither did I wish to be ungracious to my father. Nor to Sir James Barrie, who was my seconder. Moreover, my father-in-law, who was also a member, said that he would pay the entrance-fee this time. So he did; for I wasn't blackballed; and thus, at the early age of thirty-one, I had two Clubs—or at any rate two Clubs had me. A nobler character might possibly have resigned from Club A; but I had been there eight years now, I felt at home in it, and Diana was allowed on part of the premises as well. In fact, it had become quite a haunt, and a cheap one, too, when circumstances made it necessary for us to dine out. The children knew it. It was a continual convenience. I still didn't at all want to give it up.

Encouraged, accordingly, by Diana, I didn't. I went to Club B sometimes—which eventually, but not yet, would develop an annexe for Diana, too—and felt rather a babe in arms. There were beards and bishops. There was a member who cleared his throat in a manner that I have never heard equalled. There was also an aged member on crutches, who used to pick up the newspapers with his mouth. But it was impressive, and not only I but—as I now discovered—my acquaintances were very considerably impressed. Of course I must go on with it—again with Diana's encouragement, though she has never had a Club of her own—and of course, in the long run, I should be glad that I had. One day I might even set eyes on a member who was younger than myself. Alas and alack, this fragment of the unknown future has already long since come to pass.

Now, however, you realize my dilemma when—thanks to Messrs. Milne and Wodehouse—I found, at the age of thirty-seven, that I had also been elected to Club C. It was very much for men only.





ANNE WITH TOPSY, 1928



It was largely literary and theatrical, though it seemed to contain a good number of lawyers as well. One lunched or dined at a long table, and was supposed to speak to the other members—which was quite different from Clubs A and B—whether one knew them or not. I had been taken there on several occasions—first in a hansom-cab by Sir Herbert Tree, when I was only twenty-one—and though I was still terrified of that notion of talking to strangers, I knew quite enough about it to realize that, again in the course of ages, it might provide me with an atmosphere that was quite unobtainable elsewhere.

Well? What on earth was I going to do? Ask Diana, of course. She said: "If you want to join it, and if you can afford it—then why not?"

"It's ridiculous," I said, "for me to have three Clubs."

"Of course it is," she said. "But you're not really so very extravagant in other ways."

"Aren't I? Well, you see, Club A *is* useful when we go out together, and I *do* get my hair cut there—no, stop laughing!—and I can't possibly leave Club B, because think of our fathers, and, besides, it really *is* worth belonging to, even if one doesn't go there; and then, you see—"

"You can't possibly be rude to Alan and Plum?"

"Well, no. I can't."

"Of course you can't," said Diana. "Go on. Join it. I shan't mind."

So I joined it. Nobody paid my entrance-fee this time, and almost the next thing that happened was that Plum had another of his fits of disgust, and resigned. However, I was now, thanks to Alan, so far on the way towards feeling at home there, and so much interested in discovering whether I should ever be able to tell long anecdotes like the other members, that there was no longer the least risk of my following Plum. A further advantage was that Alan lunched there every day, and went in a car, and lived just round the corner, so that I could almost always count on a lift. Was I becoming a real Club-man, then? Not quite. I couldn't play cards. No one dreamt of putting me on a committee. For weeks and sometimes months at a time I forgot to go near any of my Clubs at all; though I sometimes made up for this by trying all three in one afternoon. My position, in fact, remained anomalous and no doubt ridiculous, but I still paid three subscriptions for another ten years. Disgraceful. What about Lend

to Defend? But of course that wasn't the point in those days, when authors were still allowed to earn a living, and to spend three-quarters of the proceeds as they chose. I'm not going to apologize. Nobody really suffered. And fond as I could be of all three monasteries in turn, I still infinitely preferred the hours in my own home.

Yet another Club comes flitting across this summer of 1929, though I never belonged to it at all. But Diana's father did for a while, and it was Hurlingham, and I don't think he ever set foot in it; but he gave his daughter a book of vouchers, and we went there a lot, and watched polo—and an extraordinarily sluggish croquet-tournament—and listened to the band, and had strawberries and tea. Flats were already overlooking the lovely, riverside grounds, and one knew somehow that this kind of peace and pleasure wouldn't be allowed to last. But it was refreshing. We had happy times there. And I still can't see that we were doing any great harm.

Diana off to Ascot; but the author has a detestation for his best clothes, and in any case won't leave his desk. Both of us off to Wimbledon again. Publication of *Another Part of the Wood*. July, with the Eton and Harrow match, and the children and little Dorothy there as well. Another night with the Milnes in Sussex, to see a pageant, where the sun nearly roasted us to death, but we all found something to laugh at. And then the children's summer term was over, and again we were all down at Nonesuch.

The yacht had now been supplemented by a motor-launch, of considerable size and seaworthiness. There was a Nonesuch fleet, in fact, though it still couldn't lie at anchor there. It was stationed at Cowes, and was now entitled—the elect will know why—to fly the White Ensign. The advantage of the launch was that if you could once get on it at all, you more or less knew when the voyage would be over. It took us up the Beaulieu River, to Southampton, to the Isle of Wight, or round one of the forts at Spithead. It moved at a spanking pace, over or sometimes through the waves, was tossed about by the wash of the great liners, but on the whole was a considerably more comfortable vehicle. The owner seemed disposed to despise it, as being showy and less traditional than the yacht; but on the other hand it was entirely his own notion that it was now on the scene at all. I feel, suddenly, and after all that has happened since then as though I were a White Russian describing the glories of his old estate. But

of course it wasn't mine, really, or even Diana's. We were only a couple of the more privileged and occasionally bewildered guests. It was all so unimaginably different from Walpole Street, which personally I still regarded as our basic standard. We were grateful, we took every advantage of the luxurious facilities, but I don't think we ever entirely believed that it was all quite true.

This August, as we bathed, or played games, or sat on the terrace, the sound of the seaplanes was frequently dulled, by comparison, to a mere murmur by a noise like the father and mother of all hornets. If you tried to look at its apparent source, you saw nothing. But if you looked about half a mile to the right or left, you saw something hurtling through the sky with demoniac energy. This would be one of the entrants for the Schneider Trophy, practising for the forthcoming contest, which a British victory at Venice two years ago had now brought to these shores. The Trophy itself was the kind of ornament that might possibly affront one's taste in the corridor of a five-star hotel, and no other prize was offered. But the donor, who like so many Continentals was a Frenchman with a German name, had certainly managed to make it well known, as well as to produce an extraordinary amount of ill-feeling between the countries contributing to this effect. If anybody won his useless symbol three times running, they would be allowed to keep it, and the whole thing would lapse. Meanwhile, lives must be risked and money spent like water in the sacred cause of speed, and ultimately—though one wasn't supposed to say so—in the cause of still more destructive weapons for the next war. I have always loathed aeroplanes, whether equipped with floats or landing-wheels, and I always shall. There was no question, in my mind, that they were an invention of the Devil, or something with which the human race most definitely couldn't be trusted. I knew also—which again one was supposed to overlook—that not one of these horrible machines left the ground or water in this country without the taxpayer's assistance, even though it were ostensibly engaged in the most pacific pursuit. So I tried not to look at these Schneider hornets, though I admit that this was partly because I didn't want to see one of them crash into the sea. While my dogs, I am proud to say, treated them with the utmost contempt. They blinked, when the noise was particularly deafening, but they never raised their heads. Men, as they well knew, were responsible for a number of unpleasant and pointless noises, and this was un-

doubtedly one of them. But they were faithful fatalists, with complete confidence in the family that fed them and took them for walks. If there were danger, we would save them. If there weren't, they must just put up with the row. Once more I was abased, and still am. For those Pekes were so very much wiser than the creatures who were soaring, at well over three hundred miles an hour now, towards the full development of the Spitfire and Hurricane.

August 18th. Diana's birthday again. A tip from me, noted in the account-book, and plans for a special, anniversary outing in the motor-launch. We prepared our picnic, we waited on the shore, we saw it approaching, we saw it stop. After a long delay, the captain came ashore in the dinghy, and informed us that it had stuck on a sand-bank and must remain there until the tide took it off. So I changed my yachting-cap for something less provocative to Providence, and if the children were disappointed, I think their parents took the whole thing well. We played golf-croquet, I expect, or we took the dogs in the woods. More stentorian snarls from the empyrean, but what did anything matter if we could be together and in our own circle on this very particular day?

More donkey intelligence—or at any rate intelligence about the donkeys. There were three of them now, and if you ask how the third had appeared, I can only say that George had grown up, that neither he nor his mother had read the last page of the prayer-book, and that a most enchanting baby had joined them in the shelter and the field. Natural or even inevitable as this was, I am afraid we were all a little shocked, and steps were taken to see that it shouldn't happen again. But I thought of Rufus's pedigree, in which it was quite frankly revealed that his great-great-grandfather was also his grandfather, and if blame attached to anyone in either case, it certainly didn't fall on the so-called brutes. The new donkey was called Dick, and was a great pleasure to everyone who saw it. A year later a fourth donkey joined the herd or pack; little Benjamin, whom my father-in-law had bought because of his delicate appearance—which was indeed no illusion, whether or not it had actually resulted from overwork. So the baskets of food grew larger than ever, and the time spent in feeding the donkeys would grow longer and longer, in the rest of the story of this house overlooking the Solent.

Towards the end of August Diana and I—and the dogs, of course

—had another six days with J. M. B. and his house-party at Stanway. Many of the guests were coming and going, and this was the visit when we had our only meeting with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Doyen of the *Strand Magazine*, and therefore eyed by me with special reverence; but the very last character to demand it. Still, at the age of seventy and with less than a year left, an incorrigible enthusiast; not only about literature and spiritualism, but about a new method, in which he tried to instruct me, of doing physical exercises without getting out of bed. The pathetic reason, of course, was that he had once been an athlete, and was now a large man with a weak heart. We all loved him, and of course we all loved Barrie, and again there were happy times, until suddenly we had packed and were driving away. A characteristic wave from the small host, standing there on the door-step, and again Stanway was a memory, and the Solent lay ahead.

On September 7th the Schneider contest took place in glorious weather. About forty guests arrived to see what they could, though those who followed the broadcast commentaries at the same time were the only ones who could really tell what was happening. There were no accidents, thank goodness, and Great Britain had now won, by a victory over the Italians, for the second time. In another two years it would all blow up again, international ill-feeling would be still more bitter, and there would be a good deal of domestic anger because the Government had tried to wash its hands of the whole affair, and it had been left to Lady Houston to finance the home team. Thus at last the original and perhaps innocent conception would produce a speed of four hundred miles an hour, and so pass, in a welter of animosity, to its final and still more ear-splitting phase. Well, never mind; it was only one of the signs of the times, and soon enough—if this were what people wanted—the Government would be spending millions on aeroplanes because it could find no method, apparently, of doing anything else. Meanwhile, and for the moment, conditions were distinctly quieter at Nonesuch; and two days later Diana and I and Rufus—but this time with Mary and Topsy as well—again drove up to London and caught the night train for Edinburgh and North Berwick.

Another visit, in other words, to the kind Dalziels, who had again taken the same furnished house. More chicken for the dogs. The generous loan of a car, in which we explored the surrounding

country. And a couple of trips, in a public motor-launch, round the Bass Rock. Ostensibly for the pleasure of his little grandson, the host had provided a toy railway, of considerable elaboration, which covered the whole of the billiard-table—and if you know of a better use for a billiard-table, I don't. Long after the grandson was in bed, Charles Dalziel and I spent hours with this miniature system. Our object was to avert collisions by the narrowest possible margin and most ingenious use of the track. Every now and then there was an appalling impact, and Charles, with that neat, slim pipe in his mouth, indulged in an outburst of silent chuckles. Our wives thought we were being rather foolish, but we didn't care. The mighty minds of a chartered accountant and an author of clean fiction were unbending on their respective holidays. And one has to be grown-up to play properly at trains.

Suddenly I got into a real one, because I'd idled long enough, and shot back to my study in Church Street for a week of concentration by myself. The only mischief I seem to have got into was cashing a hard-luck-story impostor's dud cheque. But after all that only took a minute; it wasn't nearly as bad as the day when another impostor got into the house, and when we both knew that he was an impostor, and when I tried to press money on him so as to get him out again, and when he insisted on wasting an hour and a half in telling me how he had fallen so low. I think his notion was that I had earned this recital; or perhaps he enjoyed giving it. But in any case there were no twelve hundred words on that occasion, and seldom have I felt less blessed by the act of giving. The dud-cheque affair, however, was all over in a flash, and the rest of my lonely week was all devoted to work.

Then back came Diana, and the children, and the dogs, and it was time for another cheque for the Tite Street school. The autumn was on us, and set off with the publication of the first of my mammoth collections of short stories. *How Amusing!* Out of print now but well worth the money, at any rate in ink and paper, at the time. This volume was somewhat graven on my heart, because for some reason the proofs had come to me not even in galleys—which are quite exasperating enough—but in immense sheets of sixteen pages each. I had had to correct them on all-fours on the floor; and that isn't how an author really likes to read even his own stuff.

And then there was a domestic tragedy to record. I am ashamed



of not having mentioned the victim before. I am afraid I had been rather taking him for granted, for though he was there all the time, he was a very unobtrusive sort of cat. He dated from Walpole Street, where we had made several attempts—all ending in disaster—to equip ourselves with a kitten, and had finally abandoned the idea. Not that there weren't any mice there. There were, indeed—though nothing to the black-beetles in the house on Campden Hill—and how well I remember the night when a bomb fell on Chelsea Hospital (it would be twenty-three years before I heard such a sound again), and Diana refused to stay in the kitchen; but only because a mouse had run out from under the fender.

After the disasters, however, somebody else's full-grown tabby suddenly decided to come and live with us. If we had known the owner, of course we should have made every effort to return it. But we didn't. The tabby made no effort to tell us. And as the cook had immediately become devoted to it, and as Rufus was at least mildly benevolent and friendly, it also joined the staff. The cook called it Tim, and it was a fine, handsome somnolent sort of beast. Moreover, having made this choice, it stuck to it. It didn't only come along with us to Kensington—though I had always heard that cats would walk hundreds of miles to return to an old home—but joined in the second exodus to Chelsea. We had no idea how old it was, but we were quietly looking forward to many more years of its strictly reserved companionship, when suddenly there was a disaster again.

Poor Tim was attacked in his own area by a hateful terrier, and so badly injured that all Mr. Batt could do—for of course he was immediately summoned—was to waft him swiftly into the next world. The cook was inconsolable, and I can't say that any of us didn't feel a strong sense of loss. But we had wire-netting fixed to the front railings, and a notice, to which, I fear, the tradesmen paid little or no attention, instructing them to Shut the Gate. And we procured another kitten, who seems to have been called Miggs. I can't think why this name was selected. I can hardly believe that I was responsible myself. But there it was; and though Rufus was rather apt to look in the other direction when it tried to speak to him, Topsy took it to her gentle heart at once. What games they had together, over and under the drawing-room furniture, until the whole place seemed to be full of paws and whiskers and tails. But never of claws; for Miggs, though young and in many ways thought-

less, knew from the beginning that Topsy was only having fun. How she hid, and how she pounced, and how they raced about together, until at last the kitten was restored to its subterranean home. But she never barked, for that might have been alarming, which was the very last thing that she wished. Every day, and at the same time she would give me a look which meant "Where's that kitten?" and then I went down and fetched it, and the games started again.

But only for a matter of weeks. For the tragedies weren't over, and one morning, early in December, poor little Miggs was found dead in the area, too. Quite dead; and this time it was believed that it had strayed into the road and been run over, for there was no evidence against any kind of dog. So this time it was Topsy who was much more inconsolable than the cook—still consecrated, no doubt, to the memory of Tim—and there were painful moments, for many days, while she still asked me that same eager question after lunch. There were no mice at Church Street, with its tiled basement, so perhaps we wouldn't risk disaster again. We didn't, in fact, until Anne suddenly came home from a school-friend's house, years afterwards, with the plain but never-to-be-forgotten Charles. And I mustn't start writing about him yet.

An autumn, otherwise, of hard work on my part, of occasional lunches at my new Club—where I was making a number of acquaintances, though frequently without discovering their names—of plays with Diana, and of dinner-parties with our real friends. The Milnes, the Wodehouses, the Hopwoods, the Dalziels, the Stricklands, Cynthia and Bebe Asquith, the two Dorothys, my cousin Di—these are somewhere on almost every page. And all the memories are good ones.

No children's party of our own this Christmas, for which omission there was no doubt some excellent reason at the time. But plenty of other parties for our two little girls; and for their parents, as usual, an end-of-term entertainment at the Tite Street school. I can't say I remember the programme, but there was an earlier one that I am never likely to forget. Part One took the form of dramatic excerpts from *Hiawatha*, with some of the children—including Mary, in the most alarming eyebrows—as Red Indians. Part Two, after screens had been unfolded and then removed, was an extremely innocent

Nativity Play. But carols were to be sung, the full strength of the company was needed, so that there, at the back of the tiny stage, was a row of Red Indians. No Old Master had ever thought of this, and it put a considerable strain on one's reason. Yet if I could press a magic button, and we could all be back there again, do you think that any consideration for two grown-up daughters would stop me? Most certainly not. The only thing that saves them is that no such button, unfortunately, exists.

Christmas itself was spent, in surprisingly mild weather, at None-such. "Masses of presents," says Diana, thinking always of the children, though I dare say we still didn't do so very badly ourselves. A week of domestic revelry completed the visit, and again we were back in London—but this time in our own drawing-room, and listening to the wireless—on New Year's Eve. End of the nineteen-twenties, which are supposed to have been so hectic and febrile, but in one family, at any rate, had been marked merely by dogged endeavour to pay our way, to keep things going, and to see that our children were as happy as the necessities of education would allow. Four years in Church Street now. Two dogs still. A cook, a house-parlourmaid, and a nurse. Here came the 'thirties, which in my case would mean the beginning of the forties; a notion which I can't say that I approved. But nothing else that has left even the trace of a scar. I had noted the crash on Wall Street, in October, from what still seemed a very safe distance, and though I knew that this might ultimately affect every kind of business, it had shown no sign of ruining us yet. All right, then. On we go, as long as I still have ideas and still stick to my twelve hundred words. I should be glad, perhaps, when this wireless programme was over, for it didn't exactly disguise the passage of time. But I had already taken the precaution of filling in my cheque-book with the figures of the coming year—a plan which I highly recommend—and on the whole, apart from a natural distaste for any other form of looking forward, there seemed little cause for alarm.

Only a dozen short stories in the record of 1929, for *The Square Circle* was a big task, and I had now practically finished it in three long bursts. Income still rising, though. Up, in fact, for the fiscal year, by nearly five hundred pounds. Not bad, perhaps. Had I really done anything to deserve it? The best answer seemed to be to let the dogs out again, and go sleepily up to bed.

## CHAPTER IV

1930

WITH a rush and a spurt, to make up for lost time, I turned out four short stories in January, 1930, but the earlier weeks in both records seem mainly concerned with further festivities for the children. We all went to the Fun Fair at Olympia, for though I didn't and don't approve of circuses—on the grounds of cruelty to animals and a strong distaste for acrobats with or without nets—I could apparently support the side-shows. Then there was the Milnes' juvenile theatre-party—*Treasure Island* this year—and the glorious tea afterwards which a father or two also attended. A night out, at another play, with little Dorothy again. Anne in bed, with some Christmas-holiday indisposition, but up again—though only just—for her eighth birthday party. Eighteen contemporaries to tea, and some hired entertainers who called themselves The Three Bears. But the contemporaries were nearly all little girls, no fathers were expected, and I appear to have sneaked off, in a rather blackguardedly manner, and had tea with Plum.

On the other hand I made up for this two days later by conducting my family and little Dorothy once more to *The Sleeping Beauty* at Drury Lane. "V. good," is Diana's comment; and I think it was v. good of her to say so just after the house-parlourmaid of the period had given notice. Then, of course, as always under the shadow of a new term, came the children's appointments with the dentist. And then, for the last time, I am writing a cheque (£36 13s. 11d.) for the Tite Street school.

The holidays, in other words, were over. But the senior members—I am alluding to Diana and myself—went down for the week-end to the Stricklands at Apperley, where one of them—the author—had been roped in as an actor at the village hall. Fortunately, I only had one line to speak, but I was on the stage all the time—yes, I was playing the title rôle in Alan Milne's *The Man in the Bowler Hat*—so that I was able to do a bit of very necessary prompting as well. The distinguished cast included several of Mary Strickland's aristocratic relations, and Donald Somervell. I don't think the village had the faintest idea what it was all about, for it is rather a pro-

fessional bit of humour; but there were songs, and recitations, and other sketches, and we all got out—though the hall was illuminated by gas—without anything catching fire. On the Sunday, for work was calling urgently, we returned to London in what Diana has correctly described as an awful slow train. Just in time for one more sight of little Dorothy before she—no longer a day-girl now—set off for her boarding-school.

She left us, as a pledge, or token, or because she didn't know what else to do with them, two yellow budgerigars—called Peter and Wendy—for whom Diana (this being one of her most charming weaknesses) immediately procured a much larger cage. And this may be said to have started the birds in Church Street, which would presently multiply in the most remarkable manner, despite our joint and unalterable conviction that birds oughtn't to be kept in cages at all. I am suddenly reminded of other Church Street pets.

Our tortoise. Diana bought him, of course, in the first summer there. He was called Tortles, and browsed successfully in the little garden. Poor fellow, I don't know what he had been through before he came to us, and of course even if one buys a tortoise and is kind to it, one is only encouraging the shop to have him replaced. But we were very fond of him, and like so many of our pets he wrote a number of letters on my typewriter—or at any rate they appeared somehow, and were signed with his name—until the time arrived when he obviously wanted to hibernate. So he was packed up, very carefully, in a box, and taken to a room at the top of the house, and supplied with food and water for a bit, in case he were still not quite ready to sleep. But then he slept, or so we imagined. And then, one day, Diana came running down from another inspection, and announced that he had woken up.

"He can't have!" I said. "This is dreadful. What *are* we to do?"

"Well," she said, "at any rate his head's sticking out."

It was. But it wasn't moving. Diana touched it gingerly, and at once there was a sound which I can only liken to the deflation of what is known, by hawkers on kerb-stones, as a Dying Pig. For the appalling truth was that poor Tortles was quite dead, but that like M. Valdemar in one of Poe's unforgettable stories . . . Well, yes. I think I shall now pass on to the case of Anne's mouse.

He also came from a pet department, his coat was brown and white, and as the salesman had guaranteed that he was a boy, Anne

called him Ernest. However, he hadn't been with us more than a very few days, when it was found that he had given birth to three babies; and though he was still called Ernest, we couldn't help feeling that the salesman had made rather a grave mistake. At first the babies were bald and rather revolting—though after all this description is no special prerogative of mice—but soon enough they developed three differently-coloured coats of their own, and as they started scampering about their little day-nursery, I was moved to begin fitting it with stairways and galleries which they certainly seemed to enjoy. I also glued a fretwork emblem over the hole leading to the night-nursery, bearing the legend "God Bless Our Home."

At a later stage two of the three children were presented to Anne's cousins, but the third, who was black, and called Hamlet, remained, and was now almost as large as Ernest. What next? We were all rather wondering and doubting, when—I regret to say, and despite that legend—both mice became stricken with a violent irritation of the skin. We rushed to the Zoo, where they aren't supposed to give advice at all, but always will if approached in the right way, and were recommended a change of diet. But it failed, or the advice came too late. They both died, the cage was disposed of, and another of these fatal experiments had come to its almost inevitable end. Much sorrow in the life-size nurseries, and not only there, for even Topsy had liked watching the little creatures at play. Much profound moral speculation by the author; though of course there's no answer when one starts interfering with Nature—and when Nature herself is as notoriously callous as she is obsessed with the production of life. Dogs are the only real pets to have, and well we knew it. But meanwhile, at the end of January, 1930, the two budgerigars were climbing about and making the most horrible noises, and we had every hope of eventually returning them to their real owner in the very best of health.

On the last day of the month I took, in a sense, to the Boards again. We were asked to a little evening party by Cicely Debenham and her husband—she had been very funny five years ago in that musical comedy, and this was how we knew her—and I must have been rather exhilarated, because presently I found that I was taking part in some charades. What's more, I discovered that I was playing, for the first and last time on any stage, opposite no other than Miss Cicely Courtneidge. And she, I need hardly tell you, was very funny

too—though if anyone thinks that professionals are better or quicker than the rest of us at thinking of words for charades, then I'm inclined to allege that they're wrong. However, the usual half-hour of discussion produced the customary three minutes of dialogue and pantomime, and it was a very good party, and as Diana has again recorded, we didn't get home till three o'clock in the morning. A bit of a struggle, no doubt, with my next twelve hundred words. But I wrote three more short stories in February, which is known to be a short month, and produced them in spite of something like a plague of seasonable illness all over the house.

February and March; that was when we were always in for it, though I haven't said so before, and shall try not to say so again. The truth is, of course, that the winters in this country are far too long; that they have something like three or four months in which to besiege one's defences, and are still going strong when one is anything but strong oneself. So we all caught colds again, and went to bed, and got up, and re-infected each other, and kept this going—in 1930, at any rate—for the best part of eight weeks. "Mary in bed," says Diana's record. "Anne in bed." "In bed"—this is herself—"with cold." "Denis has a pain when he swallows." Perfectly true, though I'd forgotten it. And on one dark Friday, "Nannie not well."

Such is family life, as spring still lags, and the doctor's car returns day after day. He was a wonderful doctor, though. He had been an athlete, too, and his eye still flashed when he spoke of Rugby football. But he didn't despise me for being what is known as rather delicate, or for suffering from author's nerves. He quite understood that everyone couldn't be as sturdy as himself—though he was getting on now, and I am afraid was running more on character and impetus than on real strength—and if anyone had a disease, he cured it. He never dreamt of sending you straight off to a five-guinea specialist, but applied some ferocious drug or brought out a syringe that had belonged, I think, to his grandfather, and the next thing you knew was that you were well. Perhaps this was less remarkable in his own era, when general practitioners were more confidently concerned in getting results; but I certainly valued and appreciated him, for he stood by us, and I bless his memory still.

So E. B. Turner—for that was his name—propped me up, and I went on working, and took the dogs round the block, and continued, judging by the record, to see a good deal of Plum. Diana and I were

also both well enough at one juncture to give a small cocktail-party, which in 1930 was still, for us, rather a daring idea. No, we didn't hire a white-coated bar-tender—though later we rose to this once—but the cook made some eatables, and the host and hostess brewed a vast, nameless jorum, which at least served to produce the right social effect. "Have a cocktail," we said, without describing it further, and for an hour or so there was a very loud noise in the drawing-room, and no one seemed any the worse. Then, because one always had to do this after a party, we set off in a taxi and dined at a little restaurant—accompanied, I see, on this occasion, by the two most lingering guests. After which, but there was no question of cause and effect, we were both ill again. And so were the children, though of course they hadn't partaken of the jorum at all.

Yet spring was coming; the builder had received his seasonable instructions; and for an April Easter we all spent a fortnight at Nonesuch. A few days after our arrival, Diana and I drove in to Southampton, made our way on board the *Majestic*, and had a farewell lunch there with Plum and Leonora Wodehouse. It was they, of course, who were the real travellers, though you would never have guessed this from Plum's detachment and calm; and then, as on other and similar occasions, we were supposed to dash back to Nonesuch, and wave from the bottom of the garden as the huge vessel came slowly past. I can't remember any occasion on which anyone waved visibly in return, and rather suspect that the Wodehouses, like our other friends, were actually engaged in unpacking. But we did our best, and again I felt emotional. For Plum was to be away a long while this time, and I was going to miss him very much indeed.

More work in a bedroom. More walks with Rufus and Topsy; and—oh, dear!—increasing anxiety about our very nearly ten-year-old dog. A general slowing-down all round. Some trouble with one of his lustrous eyes. A pitiful tendency just to flap the end of his tail when we spoke to him, and still, as we called his name, preferring not to rise. The hot weather would be coming, too, which now always made him worse. What were we to do? I tried to evade this question. I told myself, like a coward and escapist, that he was Diana's dog. I knew, too, that she was watching him even more closely, and that it was she who must make a dreadful decision in the end. . . .



To my rage and resentment, another registered and distinctly uncivil letter had summoned me again to a jury. A Grand Jury, this time—a survival which has since been abolished—but again I was threatened with the direst penalties if I failed to attend; for this was how one was still rewarded for not chucking all responsibility and living in an hotel. Back to London, then—to discover the builder's workmen still rather thick on the ground—and off, early next morning, to a court-room in the neighbourhood of the Elephant and Castle. There were far more of us on this occasion, but we didn't waste nearly so much time. We were all conducted to a large upper chamber, where a series of policemen and detectives kept coming in and reeling off a catalogue of crimes. The notion, I think, was that if we didn't believe them, we could say so, and there would be no trial. But as we only heard one side of each case, and were all anxious to get back to our jobs, we naturally kept pretty mum. Furthermore, though I didn't think much of the equity of the proceedings, and had a strong feeling that some of the more brutal-looking detectives ought to be in the dock themselves, I was now suffering from toothache. Indeed, as the hours dragged by, I could think of little else, though I still lacked the honesty or daring to get up and say so.

At last we were released, this time without any payment for our services at all, and I tore home to try and get in my twelve hundred words after tea. My toothache was getting worse, though, and at a literary banquet that evening, given by the Book Society at the Park Lane Hotel, even alcohol had no effect on my pangs. Very unfair, for I happen to be one of those cases who pay regular visits to the dentist, whether in pain or not. But the only thing, in the morning, was to ring him up again. He couldn't see me until after lunch, and then he said I must come back in two hours, while he arranged for an anæsthetist to give me gas. Help!

"Well?" said Diana, obviously full of hope at my unexpectedly early return.

I told her the alarming truth—for it is my misfortune that whenever I have gas, or ether, or whatever it is, I merely exchange physical agony for several centuries in what I have always taken to be Hell—and also informed her that she had got to come with me. So she did, of course, for I can't imagine her refusing, and she accompanied me to the very scene of the forthcoming fray.

"Breathe quite slowly," said a stranger, with some ugly-looking

apparatus. "Just try and count, now. Yes," he added to the dentist; "he's taking it nicely. That's all right. Tha-at's all right."

I did my best to say that it was nothing of the sort; but I couldn't. I was sinking through the ground. A loud thumping and bumping filled my ears. I felt terribly sad. So far from being unconscious, I was a mass of spiritual sensibility. All the sorrows and torments of the world were on my shoulders, and I remember saying to myself that if I ever returned from this ghastly journey, I would see to it that no one was ever given an anæsthetic again. Not that this was the very slightest comfort to me.

Meanwhile, for eight minutes—and I'm not exaggerating—poor Diana was a witness not only to the most terrible struggle between the dentist and my tooth, but to the most frightful groans that were proceeding from my ostensibly inanimate form. I gather from her account of the whole affair that I was more or less dragged round the room, followed by the anæsthetist and his apparatus, until finally no one could stand it any more. My soul rose from the depths. I was in the chair again. I was bleeding like a pig.

"Did you—did you get it out?" I asked faintly.

"Not all of it," said the dentist. "There's a root still left, I'm afraid. But we didn't like to keep you under any longer."

"Oh," I said. "Thank you."

Diana then took me home, and I had the best part of a week in bed, where my doctor attended me, too. Shortly afterwards I received a communication from the dentist announcing his retirement from practice. I wasn't the least surprised, and neither was Diana, who had seen him visibly ageing during the ordeal. In fact, I imagine that the anæsthetist gave up business, too, though he was too much broken and shaken to tell me. Presently—the process continued for something like eight years this time—other dentists would triumphantly fish bits of splinter out of my jaw, until at last the job was done. Of course I put the whole thing down to the Grand Jury, and I still think I was probably right. There is no question that from this kind of service to another profession all authors should be permanently exempt.

It was this summer term, also, that the children went to a new school. Mary had grown out of Tite Street, and as it was impracticable to arrange for a double escort, Anne—though still only eight

—was to join the senior establishment too. It wasn't in Chelsea, which I regretted, but in the nearer part of South Kensington. Mary was to lunch there every day, Anne three times a week, and the first bill came to £48 8s. 5d. That wasn't all, though. The Mademoiselle had at last withdrawn, but both children were having dancing lessons, and Mary was attempting—though without much success—to learn the piano as well. Every advantage, you see. Or every opportunity, if the world gave them a chance. At the new school both daughters were expected to wear a particularly unbecoming uniform—I don't know why, except to advertise it, and to put a strain on their father's affection—and of course I would have kept them at Tite Street if I could. Nevertheless, there was an interesting link now with my own childhood. For the new headmistress and her partner had taught me, when they were both assistants in a kindergarten elsewhere, as far back as the end of the nineteenth century; to which, for a moment, I am now going to return.

It's my first day there; and, innocently enough, I am rather proud and thrilled. Thanks to my mother, I can already read and write—though this feat had taken her almost four times as long as in the case of my elder sister—and thanks to her, also, I have been cautioned about a possible risk. It seems that on the first day at her own school, she was handed a small block of wood, and was asked what shape it was. She said: "Square." "No," said her own instructress, astonishingly and absurdly; "it's a cube." This was a great shock to my mother, and she burst into tears. I had heard this story more than once, and had felt the deepest sympathy every time. But I had quite forgotten it when I set off in turn; until quite suddenly I found that I, also, was being handed a small block of wood.

"What shape is this?" asked the mistress.

The sky darkened, and my mind became—no, not an absolute blank, but the scene of the most dreadful, secret turmoil. I knew that I mustn't say "Square," but I had entirely forgotten the other, strange word. It had just gone clean out of my head. Yet if I said nothing, I should proclaim myself an idiot. So that finally, after a most painful pause, I chose what I could only regard as the less of two evils.

"Square," I muttered, flinching as I did so.

"No, dear," said the mistress. "It's called a cube."

So of course I immediately burst into tears.

Later in the same, fatal morning, the bludgeon descended again. At about eleven o'clock a delicious tray of milk in tumblers and biscuits covered on one side with smooth brown sugar was borne into the class-room, and handed round. So naturally I drank from a tumbler and ate at least one of the biscuits. School, I thought, had advantages, after all. I was wrong, though. I heard inquiries being made. Another child, it seemed, had gone short. Once more the mistress approached me with a question.

"Did you have milk and biscuits just now?" she asked.

"Yes," I said. It is just conceivable that I said "Thank you" as well.

"But," said the mistress, "you shouldn't have done that. You see, your mother never ordered them for you."

This was beyond tears. In circumstances, as it appeared to me, of the most appalling injustice I had now been branded as a thief. I was also the poor little boy whose family send him forth among rich little boys and girls, where his shameful background is immediately exposed. The shock was so violent that I still can't remember what happened on subsequent mornings; though of course the whole truth was that my mother had never been warned of this pleasant custom at all. It's a ridiculous story, in fact, more than forty years afterwards. But it wasn't long, either, before I had a quite unintentional revenge.

For it was another custom in that kindergarten class to open the proceedings with a hymn. There were no hymn-books, and my parents, though virtually saints themselves, had never gone in for forcing their children to church. Accordingly, as all the other small fry lifted their voices in praise, I decided that it would attract less attention if I opened and shut my own mouth in what you might call dumb show. I did this with such success that a few days later, when another and less ingenious little boy was observed to be still standing mute, I was suddenly drawn into the limelight as an object-lesson.

"See," said the mistress, at the conclusion of her reproaches, "how well Denis sings all the words."

I didn't give her away. I was never found out. From this disingenuous start, indeed, I developed into something of a favourite—let us hope that I had a few virtues as well—and at the end of the term I brought great glory to her by reciting a poem, with actions, called *The Conceited Duck*, in front of the whole school. Well,

actually there was almost a fiasco at the finale, because although she had told me to begin when she nodded, she had never told me what to do when I reached the end; and I might easily be standing on the platform still, if she hadn't risen and dragged me off. Now, however, and after all these years, she had turned into a headmistress with a school of her own, and I into a parent who was writing her name on a cheque.

Extraordinary. I wondered if she had been reminded of the milk and biscuits. I hoped that she had forgotten about the hymn. But there was no need to warn the next generation about squares and cubes, for they were long past this phase now, and already Anne could do sums that I should have hated to tackle myself. Diana, who had of course done all the preliminary interviewing, had reported that the headmistress and her partner both remembered me distinctly. But I hadn't met them again myself yet, and was still a little nervous of what else they might remember if I did. The children seemed quite contented, though, and of course that was all that mattered to any of us now.

Three days after their term started, Diana and I and the Milnes all went off together—in the Milnes' car, of course—to another banquet at which Barrie was in the Chair. The Royal Literary Fund Dinner of 1930, held on his seventieth birthday, and attended by a very large and distinguished throng. I think I had one dry and sardonic glance from him, but it was no occasion for thrusting oneself forward; nor, as he rose and began speaking of his early days as a journalist, did I hold a hundredth part of the clues that would come to me through subsequent research. There was no distant notion in my mind—or in his, either, I am pretty sure—that I should ever be his biographer; so that again I just let myself be overtaken by the magic, like everyone else in the big banqueting-hall. I could look back, and did look back, to the days when he had visited my nursery, or when I had been taken to the house in Gloucester Road, and he had entertained me by wrestling with his St. Bernard. But beyond that all was still vague and misty, or illuminated by anecdotes to which I had never attempted to put any particular date. Extraordinary again, now that I think of what was still hidden. But the Milnes and the Mackails again enjoyed themselves, and again, when it was all over, we were driven back to our own green door.

Other and simpler dinners as the month went on. A play or two. The Chelsea Flower Show. And some hard work on a novel that still had no name. But I know quite well what was always at the back of our minds. Rufus. Ten years old on the well-remembered eighteenth. But no better or stronger than he had been at Easter; and indeed obviously growing worse. Hardly able to get round the block now, sometimes. Lying and panting on the cool parquet of the drawing-room floor. His once glorious eyes clouded. Even his appetite beginning to fail.

Once more I would leave a decision to Diana, telling myself—which was true, but hardly heroic—that he had always really been her dog. Mr. Batt came more than once, but though he is the kindest man in the world, and would always hold out hope as long as he could, now he could only tell us that if we were to be kind, Rufus must be released. So many memories of Walpole Street, of Campden Hill—where Rufus was once lost, for nearly an hour, in Kensington Gardens—of Church Street, and of all the country visits which he, too, had shared. We thought of his one great illness—years ago, at my parents-in-law's house in Essex—and of our joy when at last we managed to pull him through. But he was too old, this time. Altogether too old and feeble. And we knew that Mr. Batt was right.

So Diana gave the word, because I still couldn't, and on May 29th Mr. Batt was to attend his poor little patient for the last time. All that morning Rufus slept in my study, as he had done so many hundreds of times before, and somehow I again managed to work. I looked at him, I could neither face it nor believe it; but still, from custom, perhaps, more than strength of character, my pen continued its task. At lunch he was to be given a specially succulent dish, with a tiny pill in it that would make him drowsy. Then Mr. Batt came, and he and Rufus and Diana were all together in the drawing-room; while Topsy and I stayed outside. I knew, and Diana would confirm this through her tears, that our dog would feel no pain, have no fear, and pass quite unconsciously away from the warmth and light. He could only just be aware that his adored mistress was gently stroking him, until the dream faded, and the end came.

But it had come now, as I sat upstairs with Topsy on my lap. For a night the little body lay under a soft covering on the sofa in our bedroom, while Topsy—only faintly puzzled as yet—slept alone on Diana's bed. Then Mr. Batt returned, and took it away, and pre-

sently came back again with the ashes in the small, sealed, oriental jar. I think it had originally contained ginger, but there was a small Peke on the top of it, and who shall say, after this, that Mr. Batt isn't a man of profound sympathy and sensibility too? We kept this urn for ten more years; until, in fact, we were suddenly without a home. And then Diana broke it—and, alas, another one—and scattered the contents over a garden which only our beloved Topsy had known.

Other honours were paid our beloved Rufus, too. I turned from my novel, and wrote a short article about him, which was published—together with his portrait—in a London newspaper. I had quite forgotten that I should be paid for this, though my agent hadn't; but I wasn't really, because the cheque went straight on to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals—a last bequest, one might say, from our faithful and still unforgotten friend.

And Diana ordered a tiny tombstone, or cenotaph, from a monumental mason, which stood at first in a corner of the Church Street garden, and I hope is still standing in that other garden that we had to lose and leave. There is no need to defend any of these actions if you are a dog-lover; and if you are still in outer darkness—as I was once—then it would be useless to defend them, either. A companion had entered our household on the end of a leather lead, had stayed there because he had nowhere else to go, had been fed and cared for, but had given neither work nor payment in return. Yet there was no debt that he hadn't discharged a thousand times, while we were still left owing his memory the heaviest possible arrears. No doubt he had lacked a number of our temptations; no doubt it is easier to be simple and straightforward if you are only a dog. But to us he had been far more than this, and if such were our feelings, then naturally I wrote an article about him and Diana saw that he was honoured with a memorial in stone. Meanwhile, there was a cloud over Church Street, and Topsy looked round everywhere, and then looked at us, and then had to wait, while we were out, by herself. She was head dog now, though she didn't know it and there was no other dog in the house. But it didn't cross my mind to alter this situation, and whatever may have been far away at the back of Diana's, she said nothing to me about it yet. We mourned together, and tried not to worry our friends with our sadness, while the rest of life went on.

There was something else that was distinctly on our conscience. On that last morning, while Rufus had been sleeping in my study and the children were at school, Diana had as usual cleaned the budgerigars' cage and given them their water and seed. But in her distressed and preoccupied condition she hadn't quite closed the catch of their little front door. It had swung open again; and Wendy—like another character with the same name—had escaped and flown right out of the window. We rushed round the block, asking everywhere if she had been seen, but without any result. The fact had to be faced that we had lost a bird who had been entrusted to our care by a child at a boarding-school, and for the moment our sense of guilt, on the top of everything else, was something like the last straw.

Must we confess to little Dorothy, who might weep and never have faith in us again? Well, we didn't. At least not until long afterwards. Diana went out and bought a green budgerigar bride, Peter didn't seem to notice the difference, and thus we practised a deception on that very special and particular friend. It was true that she was never in a position, owing to the claims of education, to resume her own guardianship. And it's also true that when we finally owned up to her, she forgave us at once, and even emitted her sparkling laugh. But it didn't help things, in the early summer of 1930, that on the same day we had lost our own dog and somebody else's bird. For these things still mattered in those days, far more than the nine o'clock news.

Two days later we set off for a night with the Galsworthys, at their house in West Sussex, and you may be quite certain that there were wisdom and sympathy for us there. Not that we mentioned the unfortunate Wendy, but the Galsworthys were sound to the very core about dogs, and they were kind to us, as always, and the short visit brought great calm and peace. Until the last moment, that's to say, when, just as we were about to drive back again, I was suddenly seized with a violent and tormenting pain. Somewhere, I should have said, in the neighbourhood of the appendix, but I'd had it before when I was overwrought, and no doctor had ever attributed it to more than nervous fatigue. The correct and only treatment was to lie flat on my back until the symptoms passed; but this wasn't enough for J. G. Exasperating at it must always be for any host when



a departing guest shows signs of turning his house into a hospital, he not only stood over me with incredible patience, but pressed the most superb quality of brandy on me as well. I gulped and apologised. He seemed to think my behaviour perfectly natural, and would obviously have waited with me and gone on attempting to intoxicate me for hours. Presently, however, the crisis passed; I rose once more; the interrupted farewells were resumed, still without a hint on his part that I had done anything eccentric; and so—luckily without breathing at any policemen on the way—I drove back to London with another memory of that goodness that filled the whole scene.

Sunday, June 1st, this was; and two days afterwards, of course, I had another birthday, and became thirty-eight. But there was no party or conjuror at Church Street, for neither of us had been in the mood to make such plans. In fact, the great series of parties which I had once envisaged as continuing until I was eighty or ninety—and was acknowledged as the contemporary Sage of Chelsea—never actually got beyond the second year. Once or twice I still thought "Let's do it again"; but always, henceforth, there was something to stop me, and now that sort of world and background has gone, in all probability, for good. So on June 3rd in 1930 Diana and I dined quietly if expensively together at the Berkeley Grill Room, and came back in a taxi, and let Topsy out, and retired to our early beds. In another two years I should be forty, but already I was beginning—as I suppose everyone does—to transfer some of my feelings about it to the still remote, if repulsive, possibility of fifty. We are looked after pretty well, really, in that way. Or we learn how to defend ourselves. I was young enough, anyhow, on the following evening, when Diana's father took us to the Derby Day gala dinner at the Savoy. The revellers were given racing-plates—as for some reason that kind of horse-shoe is called—and I brought one home with me, and fastened it (with the points upwards, so that the luck shouldn't fall out) on the night-nursery door.

To the Stricklands again, at Apperley, for Whitsun. The brakes of the American car failed altogether just outside Oxford, and I sailed into the back of another vehicle; but fortunately its driver had stopped so abruptly himself that instead of blackguarding me, as I was fully expecting, he apologized. No other incidents, except fine weather and pleasant company, to report. Back at my desk on the

Wednesday morning, while Diana set off for another short visit to Paris with her father. "Mary," I have noted in my account-book, "sat up for dinner."

The time would also come—and all too soon, in one way—when I should never dream of making an entry like this. But Mary was still only eleven, and though she went to bed immediately afterwards, we both had a bit of a thrill. In fact, we were both a little self-conscious on this historical occasion, and conversed at the beginning almost as though we were meeting for the first time. Of course I hadn't really got a grown-up daughter yet, but it was a rather stimulating kind of foretaste for all that. Then I sat reading, with Topsy beside me—whose bed-time had been my bed-time always—while the fountain trickled over the two goldfish in the garden just outside.

On June 17th the B.B.C.—no longer quartered in an attic over Marconi House, as in the days of my crystal set, but still at Savoy Hill—broadcast a little playlet of mine, and at the last moment someone rang up and asked, in a friendly manner, if I would like to come along, too. So off I went, and though the performance had already begun, I was instantly admitted to the studio. I found Jack Payne and his band there, as well as what one might call my own little company, and the studio was just a room, really, and one still felt that everyone was merely having a good deal of fun. The actors read their parts, of course, and showed certain symptoms—at any rate to the author—of not having read them before. I expect they had, though. And Diana said the whole performance was wonderful. And of course I believed her, because I always do.

Hurlingham again. The Theatrical Garden Party. More little dinners. And off that novel—in which I was rather stuck—and back to still more short stories. Signs, also, in the record—to one who can read them—of a great plan for reorganizing and redecorating the first floor of our house. For the traffic noises were steadily getting worse and worse, and my study—which would have been in four different rooms by 1940—was to make its first move, as it were, to the back. The decorations and alterations were to be entrusted to a friend, who would undoubtedly run well over her promised time-schedule and estimates—as friends, perhaps, always do. But her work lasted. I'll say that for it. So I mustn't blame her now, and I don't.

At the moment, however, I still sat all morning at a desk from which I could gaze, as I battled with paragraph after paragraph, right across the street. Or further still, for beyond the wall on the other side I could see the windows and balconies of Carlyle Square. Thus it was—one morning this summer—that while groaning and muttering, and otherwise endeavouring to practise my painful craft, I gradually became aware that a baby in a perambulator, on one of those balconies, was attracting rather more of my attention than it should. It was young, but extremely active. Its owners had put it there to sleep, no doubt, but in fact it was doing nothing of the sort. It was anchored by some harness to the perambulator; but it was standing up now; it was waving its arms; it was lurching, it was——

Help! It had pitched right over the side of its vehicle, and was hanging there upside-down.

Even an author had to act, and to act quickly. I leapt from my desk. I yelled to our current house-parlourmaid, adjuring her to go to one of the upper windows and start yelling herself. And without waiting to find a hat, I rushed madly out of my residence, made a swift architectural calculation, tore down Church Street, raced along a section of the King's Road, shot up the near side of Carlyle Square, and so arrived, breathless, on a hitherto strange door-step, where I both knocked and rang. Some centuries seemed to elapse, and then a rather prim and elderly maidservant opened the door. She looked a little startled by my wild appearance, but there was no time to be lost.

"Your baby!" I gasped. "I mean, the baby that lives here. I've just seen the most awful thing. It's gone and——"

"There's no baby in this house, sir."

"What!" I tried to force my way past her. In fact, I did force my way past her, for even if she were half-witted or had deliberately planned the accident herself, this was still, as I saw it, a matter of life and death. I burst into a drawing-room, and darted to the window. There was no balcony, no perambulator, and no baby. I had quite obviously come to the wrong house.

At this awkward moment it was, of course, a relief to me to see my own maidservant signalling from my own premises in a manner which indicated that her yells had been heard and that the baby had been saved. But I can't say that this abrupt transition from a feeling of almost reckless heroism to the plane of ignominy and farce made

it any easier to start explaining my extraordinary conduct. The prim maidservant, in fact, quite clearly thought that I was dangerously mad, and I returned to my study in a distinctly rueful condition, and with my tail very much between my legs. I never even managed to use this incident for a short story, because of the embarrassment with which it was associated in my mind. But perhaps it was too fantastic, anyhow. I couldn't have editors thinking me crazy, too.

July now. On the first Saturday Diana went off for two short visits to old friends in the country, and I seized the opportunity to take Mary to a play at night. We both put on our best clothes, and sat in the stalls, and were beginning to laugh heartily—for the cast included Messrs. Ralph Lynn and Tom Walls—when suddenly the pain that had attacked me at the Galsworthys' was tying me into knots again. Poor Mary, she was heroic, and offered to come home. But I was heroic, too, for though there wasn't a chance of lying flat on my back here, I gripped my programme and stuck the evening out. The intervals were the worst part, because of the appalling temptation to accept my kind daughter's sacrifice. Then, just at the end, the knots were unravelled, and I was able to breathe again. All most disappointing for both of us; for it ought to have been such fun from beginning to end. Yet what was I complaining of when, only a few days later, little Dorothy was plucked away from her school and operated on for real appendicitis? More visits, then, to a nursing-home—in the same district where Anne had had her tonsils out two years ago—and again in the hot weather that always seemed to come at the same time. "You mustn't make me laugh," said little Dorothy, when I arrived. And I tried not to. But I still had this reputation in that quarter as a humorist, and in another moment I am afraid we were both laughing again.

Now, also, after two and a half years, I decided that I could no longer go on supporting the American car. It was still actually Diana's, of course, as it always had been, but I had been coping with its insatiable appetite for petrol and its constant demands for minor repairs; and with her permission I traded it in, and bought a six-cylinder Morris-Oxford instead. Chromium plating, this time. Thermostatically-controlled shutters for the radiator, which stuck sometimes—but then there was also a thermometer to warn one if one happened to be looking at it. Not nearly such a gentle tick-over,

but a much livelier if lower-powered engine, and extremely efficient hydraulic brakes. If it isn't actionable, so long afterwards, I might add that the clutch-withdrawal wasn't one of Lord Nuffield's happiest inspirations, as I should discover in due course; but I was immensely proud of it, and took it round for Frank Hopwood's approval and admiration at once. The body had four seats but only two large doors, so that I was no longer worried about the children falling out, and there was a spacious kind of hump at the back for luggage. It was also my first car with a sliding roof. Altogether, in fact, it seemed remarkably up-to-date, though the last time I passed the same model, only a few years later, it already appeared as ancient and ill-proportioned as a hansom-cab. This, of course, was the skill of the designers, whose object it was, in the 'thirties, to make everyone discontented with his own vehicle at least once in three years. But although, during the first few weeks, I was convinced that I should never become accustomed to a right-hand brake-lever and all the other unfamiliar controls, of course I soon got used to them, as one always does, and my Morris-Oxford became and remained a friend.

July 22nd. Historic meeting, on the occasion of the school sports, between the children's new headmistress, with her partner, and their pupil of more than a generation ago. I was highly nervous, but the extraordinary thing was that neither of these remarkable women appeared to have altered in the least. The headmistress was perhaps a little more regal; but the truth was, of course, that towards the end of the nineteenth century the world, for me, was quite simply divided into children and grown-ups, and the latter were all the same quite incalculable age. There was no shock for me, therefore—especially as nothing was said about milk or hymns—whatever they may have felt on encountering an already grey-haired pupil of thirty-eight. They were gracious, I was respectful, and the whole thing passed off well. I felt quite mad, of course, but I think I hid this. And then I stood watching foot-races, slow bicycle-races, and races on inverted flower-pots dangled by the competitors from two strings, until gradually the twentieth century absorbed me again, and my soul was once more in a comparative state of peace.

But these sports naturally meant that the term was nearly over. Four days later—or two days after the publication of *The Young Livingstones*—the children set off for their third summer holiday by

the Solent. And in two more days, after a great deal of tidying up and putting away—in view of all the decorations and alterations that were to begin—Diana and I and our three-year-old Topsy followed along in the new car.

Yes, Topsy had been three now for nearly a month, which for dogs is the prime of life. Still small and sleek. Still kind and gentle. Still curiously keen on toads. Our only dog since Oak-apple Day, and no longer puzzled by this position, whatever she may have remembered sometimes in the old, familiar scenes. Hours, inevitably, when she must be left alone, for even the Mackails couldn't take a Pekingese everywhere; but hours faced with patience and philosophy, and mostly, one was almost certain, in quiet, curled-up sleep. No mad rapture on our return, no barking and leaping into the air, or laddering of Diana's stockings, for that wasn't Topsy's way. But she had always heard the latchkey, she was always just inside the drawing-room or bedroom door; and then, as we opened it, she waved her tail, and seemed to smile at us, and indicated her complete readiness either to stay where she was or to come out for a walk. In other words, but without the faintest trace of subservience, she wanted what we wanted, and whatever we wanted was right. No criticism from Topsy, ever. No Pekingese pride of that sort, though she was particular enough when it came to making friends with dogs.

She made no demands on anyone—though two people, at any rate, couldn't possibly have given her more love—and had invented no strange and difficult rules, as some Pekes do, which all must learn to obey. She was a lady; but she also fulfilled the first qualification of being quite unaware of it. She hadn't an ounce of conceit. "Topsy," I would say, thinking of the fairy-story of the Frog Prince, "if I threw you against that wall, would you change into a beautiful Chinese princess?" "Try it," said her benevolent expression. "I might. But I'd rather be your dog." So, of course, I didn't try it, and had never, of course, contemplated anything so cruel for a moment. She waved her tail again, because I was looking at her. She slept, because there were moments when I was necessarily occupied with something or someone else. Even those who dwelt in outer darkness weakened when they saw how small, and neat, and gentle she was.

Not that we had forgotten Rufus, for here at Nonesuch, just as

at Church Street, it still and always seemed that he must be somewhere just round the corner. When Topsy sat on my lap, and I stroked her taut little body—for she wasn't one of those Pekes who remain boneless and elastic to the end—I still felt sometimes for Rufus's one, slightly-projecting rib. If I ever find myself in Heaven, and don't immediately recognise him—because he is young again, and no longer has the grey mask which in the last months grew so sad—I shall bend down, and feel just behind his right arm; or fore-leg, if you are going to be as fussy as all that. If I feel that little rib sticking out— But no, of course he will have known me at once, and there will be no need for me even to start bending, for already he will have taken a flying leap towards me, in the sure knowledge that I shall catch him before he falls.

If only it could be like this. Though it must be, if there is any Heaven at all.

Bathing again, and the seaplanes, and the oil-smell, and my own summer holiday once more. Slightly less ignorant attitude towards the Cowes Regatta this year, for we have at least and at last picked up some of the appropriate language. I suddenly find myself lunching—though the owner isn't there, and I don't know him—on Mr. Selfridge's *Conqueror*. Fearfully impressive, though I should undoubtedly be more comfortable ashore. The Nonesuch motor-launch is still standing by and ringing up for orders, but the original sailing-yacht is out of commission, and a far larger vessel, with a crew of nearly a dozen, has been chartered for the season in its stead. Personally, I never set foot on this craft, though I could have done so if I had been more nautical by nature. But Diana and Anne saw the fireworks from its deck; and a few days later set off, with the temporary owner and another passenger, on what was planned to be a long cruise in the general direction of Land's End. Hardly had they started, when the wind rose; and that night, with Topsy curled up on the foot of my bed, a gale made the house tremble, and I was indeed in something of a state about all poor souls at sea. And justifiably; for as this particular party passed the Needles, tempestuous waves swept right over their ship, they all (except Anne) felt exceedingly unwell, and it was only after some really terrifying experiences that they succeeded in anchoring off Swanage.

Here they seemed to have dined at an inn, where the decision was

reached that they had all had enough. So next morning they started again, some by road and some on a slightly calmer sea, and were all home by tea-time. This, in fact, was the end of the longest voyage that was ever actually undertaken; and apart from another occasion when there was no wind at all and the vessel remained completely motionless, I don't think that any of my own family embarked on it (or her) again. The big yacht continued to be a symbol rather than a method of transport. I don't know what the crew thought, though crews on the Solent, in those days, must have been well accustomed to a good deal of hanging about; but for my own part I still knew that I was never intended for a life at sea. Even, in fact, when I went on the launch now, I had given up wearing my yachting-cap. I found it much more comfortable to stick to a soft hat with a brim all round.

I dashed up to London—spending the night at Club A, and most of it in switching off a light in the corridor that shone through an unshaded transom, for whenever I snatched a few winks the night-watchman came round again and turned it on—with the object of inspecting progress at Church Street. Little or nothing had been done, and I discovered that our friend, who was supposed to be in charge of everything, had gone off for a holiday abroad. As I couldn't go after her, I could only return to the country myself.

And then we all had a week-end with the Hopwoods, who were spending their own holiday near Chichester. Frank and Audrey had recently returned from another business expedition—this time to the West Indies—and had brought back a land-turtle which was pottering round the garden, and with which Topsy did her utmost to make friends. A pleasant visit, for Mary was very much Moira's friend now, and Anne very much Michael's. Some tennis of a not too strenuous or professional nature. Further and successful efforts on the part of our hosts to supply us with the best possible food and drink. A great deal of laughter from both generations; and so back to Nonesuch; and on, almost at once and without the children, for another five nights at Stanway.

A big house-party. A play, by the children, on Simon Asquith's birthday. And one of Barrie's golf-croquet tournaments, in which I beat Timothy Llewelyn Davies (aged nine) in an early round, but was then knocked out by someone nearer my own weight. That must have been in the morning, because I know quite well what



some of us—including Diana and myself—did in the afternoon. Thursday, August 21st, 1930. A grey, windy, and bitter Gloucestershire day. We went to a simple fête in the near neighbourhood, where in fact there was very little to do. But as Diana and I stood waiting for another member of the party to emerge from a fortune-teller's tent, we suddenly saw a middle-aged woman in a rain-coat, hauling two Pekingese puppies along with her on a couple of collars and leads.

Well, you know what Diana is like, or you ought to by this time. She immediately pursued this woman, stopped, started talking to her, and was soon bending down and fondling both pups. One was the colour of ginger. The other, which is most unusual, was more or less the hue of a grey tabby cat. I can't say that they weren't attractive, though, or that I wasn't by this time also hovering round. Then Diana left them, and spoke to me.

She said: "Poor darlings, they're for sale."

"Are they?" I said. Just like that.

"Yes," said Diana. "And, of course, the ginger one's a little more expensive, but she's really frightfully cheap."

"A girl, is she?" I said, guardedly.

"Yes. They're both girls. I—I think I've practically bought her."

"But good heavens!" I said. And "No, no," I thought. At this moment the innocent and incomparable Topsy was alone in a bedroom at Stanway. She mightn't like this, but would she be any happier with a girl puppy? Besides, though only one person in the world missed Rufus more than I did, I couldn't help being aware that two dogs are an infinitely greater burden and responsibility than one. A certain amount of argument developed.

Topsy, said Diana, was lonely.

I said I didn't think she was, now. I also pointed out that, even among Pekingese, girls seldom made friends. The last thing we wanted, I said, was to be let in for a lot of quarrelling and biting.

"As if," said Diana, "Topsy could quarrel with *anyone*!"

She had me there, of course. I was losing ground. We continued to argue, however, whenever we weren't otherwise engaged. And I hadn't by any means given my perhaps superfluous approval when I found, on the following afternoon, that I was taking Diana over to see the ginger puppy and its owner at their rather humble home.

"Yes," I said, as we drove away. "Of course it's everything you

say it is. All Pekingese puppies are. But think of Topsy's first few nights. We can't possibly risk that sort of thing in a house like Stanway."

"But the woman said she was trained," said Diana.

"That," I pointed out, "was what the other woman said about Topsy."

"Well," said Diana, "when we go on to the Stricklands *they* won't mind."

"Yes, but——"

More argument. Here, however, is the end of the entry for August 22nd in Diana's engagement-book. "Have nearly bought a rather sweet lady Pekingese—age 4 months."

Not quite, you see. I was still keeping my end up. If it comes to that, the puppy wasn't really quite four months, for it had been born—as I know well enough now—on May 8th. But Diana's "nearly" was only, I suspect, the faintest of attempts to deceive herself. For though I was still grumbling and talking about Topsy, she wrote to the woman on the very next day, clinched the bargain—at three guineas this time—and explained that we would collect the puppy in the middle of the following week.

It was I who actually drove over from Apperley, on Wednesday the 27th, accompanied by a military fellow-guest who had kindly undertaken to help me, and returned with the ginger puppy and her exceedingly simple possessions. These consisted of a small basket, with a lid to it, and a mauve-and-white blanket—measuring about four foot by three—adorned with the picture of an airship. The basket was never used again, and soon joined other baskets in a cupboard. But the blanket, though tattered and faded, was still in employment when this story comes to an end.

Such a very small, hot, staggering puppy, though; still with an almost triangular tail, yet with a thick coat of fluff already, enormous brown eyes, and singularly bulging chops. All the rest of that hot afternoon and evening it tried to follow me about—pausing only to leave another pool (for, of course, I had been quite right about this) or because it couldn't climb over the sill of a french window. But Diana was quite right about Topsy. No trace of annoyance or jealousy marred her benign expression. She stood over the puppy, puffed at it, looked up at us, and again waved her feathery tail.

By this time I may as well confess that I was infatuated. I was

also determined, after that failure three years ago, to name the new puppy myself. "To-night," said Diana, with memories of her own, "she shall sleep in your dressing-room. Besides, Topsy's been absolutely marvellous so far; but after all . . ."

I quite understood and agreed. But the puppy—who had now, I am sorry to say, been discovered to be harbouring a number of enormous black fleas—made no attempt to do either. As soon as it was left alone on its airship-blanket, the poor little thing began whimpering. Over and over again Diana or I rose once more, went in to it, spoke to it kindly, removed and dealt with a few more fleas, and besought it to go to sleep. But it couldn't and it wouldn't. As soon as the connecting door was shut, it started whimpering again.

"Pay no attention," I said. "It *must* stop if we keep quiet ourselves."

But it didn't, and in the small hours Diana's heart melted. The puppy joined us—after all, the Stricklands, if anyone, would understand, and we could always give an extra tip to their housemaid—and as a matter of fact it was never asked to sleep alone again.

And Topsy was an angel still, and the puppy snored, and Diana and I had precious little sleep ourselves. But there were hardly any fleas left by the morning, and though the dressing-room had already had to receive a certain amount of attention, there were no pools in the bedroom at all. Good. And I'd thought of a name, too.

"Listen!" I said. "It's come to me."

"What has?" asked Diana.

"I'm going to call it Victoria."

I could see that she was rather impressed. I could see also that, as the principal dog-owner and dog-lover, and sole dog-provider, she still felt that she should produce a better name herself. But she couldn't, though she certainly tried. When people asked me why Victoria was called Victoria, or suggested reasons themselves, I would dismiss both questions and suggestions in the same inflexible way. There was never any reason at all, except that I looked at that puppy and decided that Victoria was her name. Diana saw it almost at once, and Victoria she would always remain. Not Vickie, if you don't mind; though I admit that some of our servants would employ this disrespectful diminutive. Just Victoria. Or, in the very heart of her own family, Pow.

Not Pao, though the pronunciation is virtually the same, and though I happened to discover—many years afterwards—that Pao is the Chinese for Treasure. She was sleeping beside me as I wrote these words. Getting on for eleven, then, pitifully weak-sighted after two tragic mishaps, and a constant problem, in dark and dreadful days, in the matter of daily food. But except for Topsy, and Rufus—and Porthos, though my own eyes were so foolishly dimmed then—there has, of course, never been a Pekingese to touch her. Who says so? I do. And of course I know.

A heat-wave had accompanied our departure from Stanway, and as we drove back from Apperley to Nonesuch, all four travellers were gasping for breath. Victoria was sick on the way—not in the car, though, fortunately, but in a chalk-pit near Amesbury, where we paused for a picnic lunch—and was still panting and goggling when eventually we arrived. For a moment, though (what a brute!), I wouldn't let her out of the Morris; for the children had come out to meet us, and I hid her for an instant, and told them that we had brought back a surprise.

"I know what it is!" said Mary.

"You don't," I said. "You can't!"

"Yes, I do," she cried. "Mummie's bought another puppy."

No; nobody had told her. But it seems that at eleven years old herself she had come to know her wonderful mother fairly well.

Victoria waddled about the lawn; while I stalked her with a camera. Victoria blundered into Topsy; and Topsy flickered her tail and stepped out of the way. Victoria slept regularly on Diana's bed now, or on the sofa at the foot of it. She was shy, as she always would be, and not nearly as greedy as we would have wished. Her little chest was so small and narrow that one wondered how it could possibly contain a heart and a pair of lungs. But she wasn't really a weakling. And her domestic manners soon began to improve.

So ten days later—but meanwhile I had written another short story about an oil-smell—we took her, and Mary and Topsy, up to London, and embarked for the third year running on the night train for Edinburgh. Because the Dalziels had again asked us to North Berwick. Diana didn't have a very good night, though it might have been worse; and thus it was—because one couldn't leave a

puppy of that age and exigency in anyone else's care—that Victoria found herself in Scotland. Already, though she wouldn't admit it, she looked up to Topsy for everything, and was perfectly good when they had to be shut up together. Her appearance made her immensely popular. And again there was every sort of kindness from our hosts.

At the end of a week my conscience and some editors made it necessary for me to return to London—where the workmen still hadn't finished, but obviously never would unless one of us were there on the scene—so I went up by day and by myself. Diana, Mary, and the dogs were to leave on the following night, and then go back to Nonesuch for the rest of the children's holidays. But as I sat in Church Street, awaiting their early arrival, the telephone suddenly rang, and I heard Diana's voice.

Panic, of course. The train had been wrecked. Victoria was lost. Something unspeakable must have happened. "Where are you?" I bawled.

Still at North Berwick. They had started driving in to Edinburgh last night, the Dalziels' car had broken down on the way, the chauffeur had insisted on locking them into it while he went off on foot for assistance—this, said Diana, was much the worst part of the whole affair—and eventually, when repairs had been effected, all he could do was to take them back to North Berwick; where, of course, the Dalziels were in bed and asleep. What a frightful anti-climax that would have been in some houses. But the Dalziels behaved perfectly. So, I was informed, had Mary and the dogs. And twenty-four hours later a second attempt to reach Edinburgh—and London, and Church Street—was crowned with complete success. We all had breakfast together, and I wondered why my heart had ever stopped beating at all.

Then I was alone again in the new study, while my family finished off the third and last of the full summer holidays at Nonesuch. More short stories, and proofs to correct, and notes for the next novel, during the solitary days. And then, in the last week of September, not only the arrival of my wife, daughters, and dogs, but of another character, from another part of the country, as well. Do you remember Victoria's tabby-grey sister? And do you remember our cook who was so devoted to Tim, the cat? Well, Diana and this cook had been conspiring and corresponding; it had

appeared that the cook had a friend, in the shape of the man who collected and delivered our washing who had expressed a great desire to own a cheap Peke; so that a message had been sent to Wormington—which I must now reveal as the name of Victoria's birth-place—another basket had been put on the train for Paddington, and here, for the sum of thirty shillings, was the pale-grey puppy in person.

I can't say that the two sisters exactly fell on each other's necks. In fact, they seemed to have forgotten each other entirely; and though Patsy (as the cook almost immediately called her) was humble and on the whole polite, Victoria, I regret to say, took the general line that one mustn't be too friendly with dogs that lived in the kitchen. Though, Topsy, of course, was equally affable and benevolent to both.

But why, you ask, was Patsy living in the kitchen at all? What about that laundryman? These, at the time, were problems for us also. Yet whether because the laundryman had now spent his money on something else, or because he couldn't believe that an animal of that colour was a Peke at all, the fact remains that he hedged, procrastinated, became more and more unwilling to implement his own part of the bargain, and finally announced that so far as he was concerned the whole thing was off. The result, of course, was that we were now landed with three dogs on the premises—two in the drawing-room and one in the basement—and though the cook was perfectly contented to keep Patsy herself, the very nature of her calling meant that it was we who had so often to take the poor little creature out.

Three Pekes in Battersea Park, then. Three Pekes in the drawing-room after lunch or tea, when Patsy came up for a few games—and then returned, so touchingly and willingly, to her own quarters below stairs. Personally, I had taken to calling her Cinderella now, partly because she was the colour of ashes, and partly because she lived in a kitchen. And we were all fond of her—particularly the cook—though she hadn't a tenth part of Victoria's looks and charm. All this went on for months, and might possibly have gone on for ever—though the triple outings were certainly rather a strain—if Fate hadn't decreed that the cook's mother should fall ill, and if she hadn't felt it her duty to leave us, after all those years, so as to help in her own East Anglian home.

She took Patsy, or Cinderella, with her. Presently we heard that they were in another place. And then that the cook had moved on again, and that this time—under pressure of circumstances, no doubt—Patsy had been left behind. In good hands, we were told, and with every prospect of security and comfort. But for us the last link had snapped now, and neither we nor Victoria ever set eyes on her again. An odd and rather sad part of the story. It certainly taught Diana never to trust a laundryman's word again. But it might have been worse, I trust and hope. And, indeed, if one starts thinking of what happens to thousands of puppies, every one of whom is born with complete confidence in this hideously unreliable world . . . No, I don't think I'm going to end that sentence, after all.

Autumn, once more. The children at school again or at their dancing-class. Their father working. Their mother taking Victoria to a photographer's in Baker Street. The whole family prostrated, one after another, by the usual violent outbreak of colds. A banquet—which again I had forgotten, but I remember it well enough now—given by a Siamese contemporary at Oxford (who had now acquired a totally different name and turned into a Royal Highness) for survivors of his own epoch. Claridge's putting its very best foot foremost, our host smiling as only a Siamese can smile; and then—who were these elderly, grey-haired, and even bald-headed gentlemen in dinner-jackets who were surrounding the long table and dealing with course after course? Alas, they were, or had once been, my fellow-undergraduates; and I was one of them; and they were probably having the nerve to think that even I hadn't worn too well. I rushed back to Diana, though not before the end of the party, and asked her if I really looked as old as all that. "Of course not!" she said. "Of *course* you looked the youngest of the lot!" She hadn't seen them, but I was momentarily comforted. For no one can lay it as a charge against me that I don't always get everything out of Diana that I possibly can.

Lots of Dot, or Dorothy senior, I am glad to note, as the autumn still slips by. She came to dinner at Church Street, towards the end of October, on the occasion when Diana had just been so dashing and up-to-date and had purchased the game of Corinthian Bagatelle. Yes, it was in 1930 that everyone suddenly started poking ball-bearings with a drumstick over a board covered with holes and pins.

We played like blazes at Church Street for months; or perhaps for years—until, just as abruptly, the craze left us, and the outfit languished in a corner by itself.

And then, early in November, we accompanied Dot again on a visit to her child at school. A long drive in the Morris. A very cold little hotel. The appalling discovery that the child was in the sanatorium, where we saw her, but from which we couldn't possibly extract her. So only her form-mistress dined with us, though she was just well enough to bring two friends out to lunch next day. I doubt if the friends thought me quite so witty, but little Dorothy was still kind and courageous enough to twinkle and laugh. She took us all over the school, too, which was going to be seized by the so-called Competent Authorities in less than another nine years. And then the visitors returned to London, and the special schoolgirl went on growing up. But not too fast yet. She was far too polite to do that.

Evening at a big charity ball; and again rather an awkward occurrence. I behaved beautifully at the preliminary dinner. In fact, I could see that even Diana wasn't ashamed of me as I prattled punctiliously on both sides. I also danced a bit, during the next phase, and still—though depression was rising in waves now, and I was thinking of nothing but bed and my next day's work—with an almost convincing air that I was part of the gay throng. But then there was a gap in my partners, and somehow I found a chair in a quiet corner, and was surely justified in sitting down. But not, I am afraid, in falling fast asleep so that presently I was discovered, and aroused, and publicly exposed. I did my best to pretend that it was a sign of literary genius, and presently I was forgiven—though not because of this. Poor Diana. But of course she laughed in the long run; for I was quite determined to go on being spoilt.

On the first of December *The Square Circle* was published in London—my second novel this year—and whether because it was well-timed, or because of its great length, or because it wasn't such a bad sort of story after all, it met with considerable success. Good reviews, which I still read in those days; though one highbrow publicist and pluralist did head his notice "Why This Book Won't Do." But it sold, and was reprinted, for a quite satisfactory period; which is to say for about three months, or until the flood of subsequent fiction swept it aside. And I felt rather pleased with myself, in such moments as I wasn't groaning because I had just had to



throw a couple of days' work into the waste-paper basket again. What a life! But I couldn't do anything else, of course. And still there was plenty of paper in the world, and an agent telephoning to tell me to hurry up.

A week later there was another echo of Oxford, which this time actually drew me to the scenes of my youth. Queer scenes, in a way, for there were queer shadows over my three years as an undergraduate at Balliol; of which not the lightest was the contrast between my father's brains and my own. He had been far and away the most brilliant scholar of his own epoch, had scooped a whole series of University Prizes, had been a Fellow for a while, and still bore a name that the college honoured, and that honoured the college too. There were rows of academic initials after it, if he had cared to use them. He was now Professor of Poetry. While I hadn't only failed to secure a scholarship, or even an exhibition, but had revealed by my efforts to do so that I was only a fit candidate for Pass Mods.

At Balliol, where everyone was expected to read, and to read triumphantly, for Honours, this was a disgrace in itself. In fact, but for my father's reputation I'm pretty certain that they wouldn't have let me into the college at all. But though I arrived with no false pretences—having already given the whole show away—the Master and dons still seemed to feel that this was some sort of aberration, and that my father's son *must* be cleverer than he appeared. Not that I was entirely half-witted; and not that there weren't one or two excuses to be made. For apart from the fact that heredity doesn't always follow a straight, paternal line, I wasn't only rather delicate—at this age I was an almost perfect example of length without breadth—but had been the subject of some experiments in other branches of education at school. Nevertheless, I went up to Balliol with the knowledge that I was a disappointment, and continued to labour—or sometimes idle—under this handicap the whole time I was there.

There was another secret burden. I was only eighteen, which was younger than the average; but already I was haunted by the conviction that I should never be able to earn a living; and though I had no notion how even to make the attempt, I was distraught by a feeling that Oxford, which was costing my father so much, was consuming invaluable time. I was quite wrong, of course. I made

friends there; though they were to be more than decimated in another few years. I was acquiring, though still unconsciously, a number of other very rich gifts. But though I scraped through Pass Mods, and passed an examination in Divinity, the rest of my career was merely a postponement of the inevitable end. I simply couldn't make head or tail of Greats. There was a reprieve, after an illness that kept me away for a term, during which I abandoned Greats and tried to tackle English. But this was a disgrace, too. Also, though I had no objection to airing my views on Shakespeare or Swift, I could no more learn Anglo-Saxon—which was an essential part of the course—than I had been able to understand the difference between Hegel and Kant. I saw another examination coming nearer which I couldn't hope to pass at all. And at the end of three years, which in my own case represented only eight terms, I sneaked away from Balliol without even qualifying for the meanest form of degree.

Not long afterwards, being hard pressed for money, I withdrew my caution-money—though my father had perhaps more claim to it—so that technically the unhallowed name of D. G. Mackail was no longer even on the books. Yet here, in December, 1930, I was travelling again towards Oxford and Broad Street, in the strange position of an honoured guest.

Partly, no doubt, this was still due to my long-suffering father. Partly to the fact that Balliol, too, has always been faithful even to its most regrettable sons. But chiefly it was because the Dean of my old college was now F. F. Urquhart—"Sligger" to almost countless generations of undergraduates—because he had instituted or revived an occasion known as the Dean's Dinner, and because through thick and thin I had always had the privilege of being one of his friends. He was never my tutor—I don't know that even his patience and kindness would have survived that—but during all those eight terms I had the freedom of his big room over the back gate; and there he had struggled gently with my pessimism and melancholy in a manner which must always canonize him in my eyes.

I can't tell you how good he was to me. I can't tell you how often I threw all the burdens on his shoulders, and left them there with fresh hope. He was the one don who never held my father's reputation up against me, even at the back of his mind. He let me believe

that he liked me for myself. He let me say anything that came into my head. He let me bore him. I can't remember his ever suggesting, however long I availed myself of this treatment, that it was time for either of us to go to bed. Of course he was doing all this for dozens of others, too, and I'm sure that he liked a lot of them a great deal more; just as I am positive that none of them was in such a constant state of depression and gloom. But he held back nothing that I wanted to take. And even when I threw up the sponge, and told him that I had done so, he still seemed to sympathize and understand.

So then the holocausts and hecatombs began, and his hair grew whiter, and his face more lined. But the chief lines were still a reflection of the qualities that nothing could destroy; and still he was helping and encouraging the young—seventeen years after my own departure, and twelve since the end of the first great war. And he had invited me to his dinner. And here I was, asking a new porter what rooms I had been given, and then following his directions through the Library Passage, and across the Garden Quad once more.

But, heavens, it was raw and cold! One of those Oxford evenings when the walls break out in a clammy sweat, and icy mists come drifting up from the river. All very well calculated, no doubt—as at Cambridge, too—to subdue some of the excessive vitality of the junior residents. But I was thirty-eight now, I had a gas-fire in my bedroom at Church Street, and when I discovered—for it was the last day of term—that the coal-fire in the undergraduate's sitting-room that I had been given was just going out, and that his coal-scuttle was empty, I admit that my spirits sank.

I examined the bedroom, where I was supposed to face the night. I knew, of course, that there would be no fire at all here—and there wasn't—but I had forgotten that some of these bedrooms had stone floors, with a strip of carpet through which, in this case, one could actually see the stones. The word pneumonia suggested itself. Double pneumonia, probably. I sat for a while, in my hat and overcoat, by the dying fire. But I'd packed a pullover; and presently, as I changed for the Dinner in a cloud of my own breath, I put this on under my dress-shirt. Perhaps, I thought, if I wear it in bed, too—and possibly the overcoat as well—I shan't really end this visit in the Radcliffe Infirmary. But I felt anything but certain.

Then came the Dinner. The Siamese banquet had prepared me for the appearance of my contemporaries, and though there were ghosts there also—and we all knew it—Sligger was of course in his most reliable and hospitable form. I wasn't at all too hot in my unusual underwear, nor could I entirely forget the ordeal that lay ahead. But it was a good evening. I enjoyed this part of it. And though I was cold, I was pleased to find that I no longer felt really old.

Then we all adjourned to the Old Common-Room, and again, as we passed through the Quad, I seemed to be breathing icicles instead of air. That bedroom, you know. It wasn't as if I were outrageously luxurious at home, or as if I ever slept with my gas-fire alight. But seven or eight hours in an atmosphere like that! How was it conceivable that I had ever survived those distant undergraduate nights?

More memories. More efforts, not wholly unsuccessful, to prattle with acquaintances and friends. Were *they* dreading their bedrooms as much as I was? The horror was coming nearer. My conversation was growing wilder. Suddenly, from somewhere behind me, I heard an extraordinary message of hope. I hastened towards it.

"What was that?" I asked, urgently. "Did you say you were driving back to London to-night? Have you—have you got room for me, too?"

I was addressing Maurice Lubbock, who is a good deal younger than I am; but his brother had been one of my closest Balliol friends.

"Well," he said, "it's an open car, and it's only got three seats, and I've got one passenger already. But if you don't mind sitting at the back with all the suit-cases . . ."

Saved! I packed my own suit-case without bothering to change. The Broad was full of fog, and covered with a thin layer of ice. Maurice's car—as I might have known—was the kind of vehicle that tears round the banking at Brooklands. But I climbed into a sort of hole at the back, I wedged my legs among the luggage, I rammed on the bowler hat which one apparently still wore for train-journeys to Oxford in those days. And off we set.

I think we reached London in just over an hour. I know there were fog and ice the whole way. And I haven't forgotten how the car caught fire near Maidenhead, nor the dispassionate nonchalance

with which Maurice put it out. I knew, of course, that I was going to be killed at any moment, but I still thought it better to die like this than to have faced that appalling bedroom. And then suddenly we were in Chelsea, and we'd stopped, and I was climbing out—stiff and frozen—and Maurice had accepted my final expressions of gratitude and gone thundering away.

The front door was bolted, of course, as it was quite right that it should be. But I shouted up to Diana's window. I heard the dogs barking. And she came down, and let me in. So I was at work again, at the usual time, in the morning. And Sligger forgave me, because he forgave everything. And Diana quite understood—though she had admittedly been a bit startled—for the same reason. No, I'm not boasting of this episode. In fact, I quite see that it does me no credit at all. But, oh, if you had seen that bed and bedroom yourself. And, oh—alas!—the difference between twenty, whether one is delicate or not, and the ominous age of thirty-eight and a half.

Diana, Topsy, and I were all stricken with chills this month, though luckily not all at once. But the children and Victoria seem to have been spared so far, and as the school term ended there were a number of parties for two of them—which the third hadn't the slightest wish to attend. A short, Christmas visit to Nonesuch again; and back in time for another night out with the Milnes. They took us, in point of fact, to *Wonder Bar* at the Savoy, in which Dot was starring, and dancing, and singing, and looking more than an eye-ful. Astonishing, once more, that she should combine all this with the qualities that made her our special friend. I flattered her again, with complete sincerity, and again she looked pleased for a moment, and then asked after the children and dogs. One still can't get this unusual actress to talk about herself, unless one lays the wariest of traps. And even then she's out of them in a moment, and we're back on metaphysics again.

This, roughly speaking, marked the end of 1930, in which a good deal had happened in the way of change, and ups and downs. A good deal of illness. A new study. A new school for the children. A new car. A little tombstone in the Church Street garden. A new dog, now nearly eight months old. She had a fine, thick coat now, long feathers on her large feet—but large feet are correct for a Peke, provided that the Peke itself is still small—and a rich tail that fell, as

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is also much admired, in a double cascade. But for the fact that she still had puppy's ears, and would continue to have them until quite late in life, she was indeed something of a bargain at three guineas, and of course we were very proud of her indeed: But she wasn't Topsy, and we all knew that. She was more oriental, more mysterious, far more the victim of strange and sometimes unfathomable complexes, and she wasn't nearly so easily pleased. She was shy, and intensely dependent, but she could growl and snap sometimes, though she never really bit. Nothing, we had discovered, would induce her to wear harness—which is far more suitable for Pekes because of their ruffs and manes—but she had no objection to a collar, though it made her look rather a fool. We were learning to interpret her other whims and fancies, and usually gave way to them, if only because there was no real choice. She played violently sometimes—and presently she, also, would be playing that special game in which I had to pretend to bark—but often she was remote and withdrawn, and often she looked desperately sad. She wept silently, if ever she had to be scolded, or sometimes for no clear reason at all. But she could smile, too; particularly on the rather rare occasions when she was feeling greedy. And always, whatever her mood or manner, we loved her very much indeed.

But Topsy came first. Topsy, who never considered her seniority or thrust herself forward in any way, was always the principal pet. We never took sides, of course, and Topsy was so extraordinarily unselfish that we could hardly have done this if we had wished. If Victoria wept like that, it was never because of injustice or the faintest neglect. But though she was often anything but humble, she knew, too, that she could never take Topsy's place. I don't think she wanted it. I think she looked on Topsy—and if so, she was quite right—as someone with responsibilities that she would never attempt to assume. She leant on her, and relied on her, as we all did. But it wasn't Victoria, as yet, at any rate, who thought that Diana and I were gods.

Two published novels, as I have said, this year. The first draft of a third one nearly finished, but with much labour, for as well as the main outline it was to contain an enormous number of inter-related plots; and I was still frequently struggling up blind alleys and having to turn round again. And seventeen short stories for the monthly magazines. Were these pot-boilers? I don't think so, though



they were undoubtedly a great help to the pot. I was still, I believe, regarded as a humorist; but my own and only notion, all the time, was to go on trying to express something, and to use for this purpose a studious observation of life. I obviously wasn't a highbrow, and the highbrows obviously knew this, but I think I was something of an artist, according to my own lights. I took a vast amount of trouble. I plotted and planned, and made notes, and prepared schedules showing just how many words or pages were to be allowed for each incident or stage in the whole story. And always there was a glimpse at the beginning of exactly what the final result was to be like.

Yet always, as I started the real writing, I went almost straight off the rails. The notes were abandoned—though it seems that I couldn't possibly begin without them—and I floundered, and improvised, and clung to pieces of wreckage, until that other, glorious moment when I suddenly saw the end. That was happiness, however I had attained it; but the rest was grinding, gruelling, and so often bitterly disappointing work. Because I wanted the money? Yes. But I still say that it was for other, and more mystical, and possibly less discreditable reasons, too. I honestly think I had a vocation of sorts. Why, otherwise, should I have gone through all that torment, when I could still, at this period, have made a living by far fewer days at the desk?

But I was still terrified of idleness. And though Diana tempted me constantly, from the best motives in the world, even she found it impossible to drag me away from the call.

## CHAPTER V

1931

THE early entries for January, 1931, when not concerned with the heavy payments that afflict all fathers and householders at this annual epoch, show the strong influence of the children's Christmas holidays. Parties and pantomimes filled their days, and ours, too, in the sense that we did a great deal of delivering and collecting. But on January 2nd we were all involved; for this was the first season of Alan Milne's dramatization of *The Wind in the Willows*, under the title *Toad of Toad Hall*, and the Milnes' New Year party took the

form of free seats for the usual youthful gathering, with tea on the stage afterwards, at which parents also appeared. I never went behind the scenes myself until I was about fifteen or sixteen, and even then it was the rarest treat in the world. But Mary and Anne had greater advantages, or perhaps an earlier introduction to disillusionment, as had become so much more customary in their own day. They had acted themselves, their dancing-class gave a yearly matinée at a real theatre, and here they were now, munching at a tea-table on the boards of the Lyric, with no sign of being either astounded or overwhelmed. I can't assess what they gained or lost. But they were never stage-struck, though they always loved plays. So perhaps, as they seemed to take it all for granted, it made no difference at all.

And then it was Anne's ninth birthday, which was celebrated this year with another party (Bran Pie and games) two days beforehand, and a visit to *Robinson Crusoe* on the anniversary itself. I am privileged to draw some of this information from a diary of her own, which she actually kept going for nearly three months, though the entries become briefer and briefer, and the spelling is obviously a reaction from the strain of school. Or of "scool," as it sometimes appears. Not to mention "scholl," "schol," "schoole," and "shool." Thus on January 13th I read, "goning to Dentist worst luke had one stopin done sick in night." And because I am her father I know that "goning" means "going," and that "worst luke" means "worse luck." But there wasn't much wrong with the rest of this week, which was indeed just one aspect of revelry after another.

A high-light on January 15th, in the shape of our first evening Ball—ostensibly for Mary, but Anne was there as well. Again, because of the size of our own drawing-room, and because of their infallible kindness, we borrowed Diana's parents' house, where contemporaries were bidden to dance from seven o'clock until half-past ten; which made even me feel a bit grown-up. There was a band. There was a supper. There was a cotillion. And the boys weren't invariably as tall as their partners, while some of them, it must be admitted, showed a disposition to slide about on the parquet by themselves. But Diana kept everything going indefatigably. And I looked well-dressed again, and tried not to lapse into too much introspection. And as Diana has put in her engagement-book, it was really a great success. "Dorothy

Hyson and Anne Darlington the chief beauties," she has added; and without attempting to reflect on any of the others, I can tell you that "beauties" was the right word.

Next morning, unfortunately, there was the dentist again. But in the afternoon there was another *matinée*, and on the following evening—the last of this amazing week—the kind Dalziels had all four of us to dinner, and took us on to a musical play. It hadn't been possible to get six seats in a row, so three of us—of whom I was one—were watching the performance from just behind the others. I observed, after a while, that Anne was leaning rather heavily to one side. I looked again, and her head had dropped forward. I nudged Diana, and Diana nodded, but indeed we had all noticed it now. Poor Anne, worn out by dancing, dentistry, and all the other excitements, had been overcome by an exposition of sleep. The kind Dalziels were as delighted as they were amused, and presently, I am afraid, it wasn't only our own party whose attention was wandering from the stage. It became a general desire, in fact, to see how long the child would remain completely unaffected by the very loud comedian and band.

Eventually, however, she woke up, and became rather indignant at the suggestion that she had missed so much as a word. We laughed at her, and she became rather proud, on second thoughts, of her distinctly exceptional feat. The Dalziels still seemed to feel that their hospitality had been well rewarded; and the whole thing (poor Anne) would be a joint family joke from now on. In fact, we all hoped that it would happen again one night; but it never did. It gave great pleasure, however, to a considerable number of playgoers at the time. And I don't think any of the performers were ever aware of this powerful competition from the stalls.

Then it was the end of plays and parties, and time for satchels again. A much quieter house to work in, and the author back at his short stories, which would keep him busy, at the rate of three or four a month, right through to the end of May. The Hopwoods to dinner, on the first night of the new term; feeling, no doubt, something of the same reaction themselves. Farewell treats for little Dorothy, whose school started later. And the author, almost immediately afterwards, in bed with a bad cold. February on its way, in other words, with all the usual symptoms all round. But though they're noted, they weren't disastrous—Mary's German measles being more

of a nuisance than a cause for alarm—and in the midst of it all there were plenty of brief recoveries as well.

Odd evening with some acquaintances—I don't mean that we didn't like them, merely that we hardly knew them—at which a very young man (whom I didn't know at all) suddenly asked me what my income was. I was embarrassed. I felt that this was my own business; though at the same time when he put this question quite so bluntly and ingenuously, it seemed a bit uncivil to turn it aside. However, he didn't mind. He was the most resilient young man that I have ever met. He talked all our heads off. He was so noisy and irrepressible that our hosts apologized to the whole party when he departed as boisterously as he had come. I could tell you his name, too, because a very few years later he was earning far more, as what they call a columnist, than I have ever made in my life. But you'll have to guess it, I'm afraid, because I'm not printing it here. Whew! That was an astonishing experience, if you like.

Another dinner, still in February, with J. M. B. Another purchase, though I haven't mentioned this before, of one of Ernest Shepard's delicious pictures which were used, for so many years, for the jackets of my books. The series had started with *Greenery Street*, but as the publishers only bought the reproduction rights, the artist sold me the originals for myself. They were framed then, and hung in my study or on the stairs, and gave me great pleasure, for they were so sympathetic that I often wished that Shepard would do a picture first and then let me write a novel round it. But we never got quite as far as that. In the magazines the witty and no less sympathetic L. G. Illingworth was always my favourite, and I was lucky to have this interpreter too. Again, his characters filled in all the blanks that the author had failed to convey with his pen; and he never made the kind of mistake that one artist did. Namely, to show two men having lunch at a West End Club, and to put a placard on the wall behind them saying "Sausages and Mashed." Touching, perhaps, yet faintly irritating to their first creator. It was always fun, however, to turn to the illustrations when the latest magazine arrived. Even though I felt little temptation by this time to look at the text.

Signs, now, in the record, of something else. Nonesuch was still in full commission, but its overhead must have been terrific, and business wasn't improving in the sensitive world of finance. So there

was an idea, though it was nothing more yet, for finding a slightly less glorious estate, and Diana and her mother went off on several house-hunting trips together, but returned without as yet doing anything decisive. Actually, her mother would house-hunt for sheer pleasure, at this or any other period; always with enthusiasm, and always deciding just what to do with another garden and just where everyone was to sleep. But there was a faint air of reality about it all by the early spring of 1931, even though Nonesuch was to go on eating up money for more than another year.

A startling but extremely welcome bit of good news. The voice of one of my American publishers on the telephone, early one March morning, telling me that *The Square Circle* had been chosen by the United States Book of the Month Club; so that for a moment I was stricken more or less dumb. No, he wasn't speaking from America—though this was possible by now—but from the London hotel where I had so often visited him or his partner during the last ten years. It had been the custom of these two alternating characters to summon me to a sitting-room entirely full of typescripts, where each in turn had removed any possible trace of my conceit. My novels, they had repeatedly told me, were far too English—not that I saw any hope of avoiding this—and much too long. They produced figures, which I couldn't follow, to show what I was costing them. They slapped the other typescripts, and a glow came into their voices as they spoke of my more profitable rivals. I generally crawled away from these meetings—having first almost apologized for my existence—in a state of extreme depression, which lasted for several days. It was true that they had so far published everything that I had written, but they left no doubt in my mind that they had only done this from completely disinterested kindness.

Now, suddenly, all this was changed. The Book of the Month Club meant, so far as I can remember, something like eighty thousand copies straight off. These would react on the ordinary sales. And I should be boosted and boomed, with some special puffery by Heywood Broun, all over the great Republic for weeks on end. So this time I obeyed the summons in quite a different spirit, and was met in quite a different way. It was true, again, that the prevailing partner took nearly all the credit—which he deserved, no doubt, for according to him this triumph had only been brought

off by an extraordinary amount of lobbying and wire-pulling. It was true, once more, that since the triumph had never been contemplated in our agreement, he was able to secure a very fat share in it for his firm. But still I was his blue-eyed boy this March; and to prove it, instead of giving me a cup of tea or a fried sole, he took both Diana and me to a theatre. Good heavens, I was a best-seller!

I didn't remain one, at any rate in America, for the slump continued to grow worse there, and with the best will in the world I couldn't help being as English as before. But it was good while it lasted, and despite that oversight in my agreement I certainly made a nice lump sum. At this point, in fact, we are on the verge of a period when I was making real money; and however wrong this may have been—considering the difficulty of getting a camel through the eye of a needle, and the appalling and increasing level of general unemployment—I must truthfully say that it brought me nothing but happiness. My nerves were much better. My health was better. I was beneficent and even munificent. It was often quite a pleasure to meet me. I radiated distinct flickers of sunshine. And whenever another cheque came in, all these delightful qualities received another spurt. The haunting horror of blue ruin was suspended. Past failures no longer seemed to matter. And even the approach of forty took on the air of an achievement of which I was already beginning to feel proud.

The whole thing did me a world of good, as I am quite sure it does everyone, if only they let it. My income, no doubt, would have seemed pitiful to a banker, but I was saving as much as I was spending—at least, I thought I was saving it at the time—and no methodist or presbyterian ancestor could convince me for a moment that I was committing any kind of sin. If I were overpaid now, I had been underpaid at the beginning, when I had been working just as hard. Moreover, I had an odd reassurance from another cousin, with whom Diana and I were dining during this month.

He was a Labour Member (but as I had another cousin who was a Conservative Member, the effect of family politics at this moment may be said to have cancelled out), and he gave us an excellent dinner at the House of Commons. As he spoke with some emphasis of his views, I said: "I suppose you'd like to tax me out of existence, too." "Oh no," he said. "Authors and artists *earn* what they make. If I had my way, you'd hardly pay any taxes at all." As his party

was in power, or at any rate in office, at the time, I had some hope that he might enter the Government, too. But he didn't, I'm afraid. In fact, he was turned out at the next election, and I still went on paying vast sums of money for purposes which will always remain obscure. And of course there was American income-tax to be paid on that best-seller as well.

On March 28th Mary had her twelfth birthday, and as it was a Saturday, we all dined at my mixed Club and went to a revue called *Folly to be Wise*. Anne kept awake, and I was dashing and bought two programmes; and then we all came home in a taxi, and let the dogs out, and went to bed. A daughter in her thirteenth year, now. A daughter, accordingly, as one might almost say, in her teens. Incredible. Fantastic. But I didn't mind, really; though of course it wasn't going to stop at that.

End of the school term, which, as one can't help noticing, seems to govern all our plans and movements now. Quite true. I still dreamt, and so did Diana, of taking a holiday in May or June for a change, of going off together in the car, of really using my alleged professional ability to knock off when I chose. But we never did it. First I was in an office, where it was unheard-of; then I was working all the year round; and then everything had to be adjusted to suit the children's schools. We were still prisoners, though we had brought it on ourselves. But of course some people might look on this as part of our reward.

Easter, then—while once more the builder was let loose on Church Street—at Nonesuch again. But only a short break for the author, who rushed back (though it was the stairs that were being painted) so as to make up for what he regarded as lost time. Lonely. Consecrated. Or overdoing it, perhaps. But then what if one said No to an editor? Think of the school-bills—they'd gone up to well over sixty pounds a term now—and think of the fate of all authors who slacked, and think of the rainy day. Three short stories this month, therefore, in spite of that week by the sea. And something else, that we're coming to in a moment, in the intervals of skipping past ladders and workmen on the stairs.

Then back came Diana, and the children, and the dogs; and there was a good deal more noise in the house. Also some milder holiday revelry, to mark the last days before the summer term. On the day

after it started, or, to be more accurate, on the evening of that day, I put on a dinner-jacket—though I was trembling violently—and Diana and I set off for the Savoy Grill. For at twenty minutes past nine I was to deliver my first broadcast—which in this volume will also be my last—and though the notion had once seemed flattering and amusing enough, the point had now come where we both realized that nothing short of considerable artificial stimulus would ever get me to the microphone at all.

The B.B.C was still human in those days, and still at Savoy Hill. They had told me that I could talk about anything I liked—but they were quite safe, because I hadn't the slightest wish to start any controversy. And they had tested my voice, with apparent approval. And they had passed my typescript, which was innocuous in the extreme. And then, of course, I had fallen into a panic, and I was still in a panic when our dinner began.

"Drink," said Diana. "It'll do you good."

So I drank, though I also ate. In fact, the two of us knocked a pretty large hole in the promised fee, as the hands of my watch moved remorselessly on. Some friends came into the grill-room, and asked me why I was looking so green. I told them. "You'd better have a drink," they said. "All right," I said. "I will."

At about nine o'clock I told Diana that I didn't think I could stand up, let alone get as far as the studio—though it was only about fifty yards away. At five minutes past nine, however, I did stand up; and was immediately conscious (such is the power of terror over alcohol) that I had never been more painfully sober in my life.

"Oh, dear," I said; "I don't think I've had quite enough to——"

"Come on," said Diana.

This, I thought, is a pretty ghastly way of spending the evening. Why on earth had I ever said I'd do it? I was an author, not a vocalist. My place was in the study, where through my own, proper medium I could move countless readers, no doubt, to laughter, pity, or tears. Then why—— No! There was a much more important question.

"Help!" I gasped. "Where's my script?"

"In your hand," said Diana.

"Oh," I said. "Thank you."

We were in a waiting-room. We were being taken upstairs. We were in the studio, where I was told to sit down at a desk. An



announcer, also in a dinner-jacket, suddenly produced a document and handed it to me.

"What's this?" I croaked.

"Your talk," he said. "We had it typed out again."

"Oh," I said. "Thank you."

As a matter of fact, they'd had it retyped on paper that crackled loudly whenever I touched it, and they had also omitted a few verbs, prepositions, and nouns. But of course I knew the infernal thing by heart, and I managed to put them all in again, so that this part of the ordeal may be said to have failed. But the rest was quite awful. I've never heard such a voice. Nor, if it comes to that, have I ever heard such a row as when someone apparently dropped a lot of tea-things just outside the door. But I read on, glancing occasionally at Diana—who nodded at me each time, so that I very nearly stopped and thanked her again. And eventually there could be very little doubt that I had actually reached the end.

Dead silence. The announcer had vanished—I learnt afterwards that he had crept out at the beginning—but a red light, to which he had made some reference, was still burning; and as a listener I had laughed too often at voices saying "Was that all right?" to risk uttering a syllable now. Diana was equally punctilious, and we sat waiting for a very long time.

Gradually my confidence returned, or that last Brandy resumed its work. I was convinced now that the announcer had only left the studio so that he could listen to me elsewhere. In a moment, I thought, or as soon as he can master his emotion, he'll be back to tell me that he's never heard such a voice and delivery in his life. Or perhaps it'll be Sir John Reith himself who'll come rushing in—having only paused to calm his features—with an offer of a year's contract.

The truth was, however, that no one ever came near us, and after about ten minutes or so—with the red light still burning—we tip-toed out of the studio, crept down the stairs, and passed out into the street; all without interruption, hindrance, or any other sign of interest in the new broadcasting star at all. On the door-step a couple of little lads (who ought to have been in bed long ago) came up, if you please, to Diana, and asked her for her autograph. It's possible, I suppose, that they thought she was someone else. But nobody asked me for mine.

Nevertheless, I received a fan-mail of no less than seven letters, all of which the B.B.C. had opened and read first. As these registered 100 per cent enthusiasm (except for the two that were all about the writers themselves), and as it appeared that the authorities were actually quite pleased with me too (though they had been too busy to say so at the time), I presently had the offer of playing a return date. But I excused myself. Diana's diary might and did say that I had "done it beautifully," but when I thought of the cost of the preliminary agony, of taxis, laundry, special food, and still more special drink; and when I considered that by writing the same number of words and merely posting them to my agent, I could earn three or four times as much, I'm afraid I decided that my listening public must either languish or learn to read. And so, though I still wrote for the *Radio Times* occasionally, it was more than ten years before I broadcast again.

What author could possibly do more for his profession than that?

The children were back at school again, I was still writing short stories, but with some preliminary pangs for a novel that was to begin next month, and Diana, as well as running the whole household, was already turning her thoughts towards a furnished house for our summer holiday. Nonesuch was still functioning, and still hospitable—my family were there for Whitsun, but I had ear-ache, and stories to write, and had to stay behind—yet a sense of honour and independence suggested strongly that, if we could afford it, we oughtn't to shirk responsibility. So Diana made several exploratory visits to another part of the coast.

To a little town, in fact, that I am now going to call Splashcliff, which describes one aspect of it well enough. Bracing air—which Nonesuch rather notably lacked—downs all round it, considerably nearer London, and about as ugly a little town as it could be. Once, no doubt, it had been an innocent little fishing village, with a few farms in the background; but it had spread and sprawled, with both villas and bungalows, and in the clear air of that part of Sussex its few flint houses were hardly noticeable among all those bright red bricks. A great place for schools. A rough, shingly, and often dangerous beach. Modern, for the most part, and full, one would say, of a determination to spread much farther and become even uglier, yet still held back by an absence of the mysterious vitality

which had done so much, in a sense, for Brighton in one direction and Eastbourne in the other. Its regular inhabitants nearly all had scarlet and battered complexions—I knew why, when I started coming there in the winter months myself; and at all times of the year a patch of fine weather was apt to dissolve into a thick fog or a tremendous south-westerly gale. There was a promenade, with some untidy rubbish-dumps and excavations behind it. There was a great deal of sewage in the sea.

No, I can't defend Splashcliff, though it has always had its enthusiasts, and in the patches of fine weather one could certainly feel very well there. But Diana had links with it. She had stayed there, with her grandparents, as a child—just as I, oddly enough, had stayed with my own grandparents a few miles further along the coast—and she still had two married aunts in the very near neighbourhood. So that as a matter of fact, we had already twice taken furnished houses down here before this particular record begins. Then Nonesuch had tempted us, and saved us a lot of expense and trouble. But now, if only she could discover something suitable, Splashcliff was to be our holiday headquarters again.

So she went there more than once, in this earlier part of the summer, and lunched with an aunt, and inspected various premises which didn't seem suitable at all. She toyed, at one moment, with the notion of taking a school; but I'm afraid I discouraged her, when I learnt that no room had less than six beds in it. And presently the quest would be successful, though with no help, I must again confess, from me. I had a case, of course. I was working, and I hadn't been well. But when I look back, I am ashamed of the way that everything except authorship and ear-ache was always left to her.

Nothing can be duller than a description of anybody's symptoms, and I'm not going to provide it. But there was a sadness this time—which is the real reason why I have mentioned them at all—because I sent for E. B. Turner, and when he arrived I saw at once that he was far, far iller than his patient. He oughtn't to have come, in fact. He had had a serious operation—but of course doctors don't tell one this when one telephones and says one has a pain—and he saw me in the drawing-room, because I realized at once that I couldn't possibly take him upstairs. He also cured me, as he always did. But as I watched him tottering down the front steps, I felt a criminal to have summoned him; and I never saw him again. All that under-

standing, and sympathy, and wisdom passed out of my life a few weeks later, and suddenly all four of us no longer had a doctor at all. I missed him very, very much indeed, for he was my friend as well as my physician, and he had been cheering me up and taking care of me for fourteen crowded years. I decided that I would never be ill again, and I wasn't—or at any rate not ill enough to summon a substitute—for quite a while. So that in a way he did this for me, too.

I salute his memory. I repeat that they don't have doctors like E. B. Turner any longer. And still I am haunted by that memory of the change that had come over him, as he struggled out, almost for the last time, because—his widow told me afterwards—he wanted to go on helping me as long as he possibly could.

May 29th. Two entries in Diana's engagement-book. "Dining with the Milnes. Rufus died a year ago." I hadn't forgotten this, either. I never forget it, when Oak-apple Day comes round.

On the other hand, we went to a Peke Show four days later—a big one, at Ranelagh—so that if we were faithful, I don't think we were morbid. Costly creatures popped their eyes and drooped their tongues at us, while attendants incessantly brushed and combed them. Or they stood, contemptuously, while mere human beings presumed to judge them. All very enjoyable, I thought, and when I came home again I couldn't help seeing that Topsy and Victoria could never conceivably appear at a contest like that. But then I didn't want them to. And I had no complaints to make about either of them. They were our own dogs, we all knew this, and I wouldn't have changed them for any champion in the world. Nor, fortunately, did Diana go in for buying champions, or even their puppies, so there was no change, either, as we all sauntered round the block.

I was thirty-nine on June 3rd, and certainly I could have run to another party this year; but I didn't, for the series had been broken, and somehow it couldn't be resumed. So I appear to have treated myself to a very handsome present instead. Our first radio-gramophone—they weren't called radiograms yet—which I was again enough of a pioneer to buy at the very top price (they knocked about twenty pounds off only a few months later), even though the Hopwoods had, of course, committed the same extravagance first. And Mary celebrated this important date—it was also the King's birthday, in those days—by going to the Derby, which I have never

seen in my life. A school friend's father—who must have been much less frightened of the headmistress than I was—just plucked her and his own daughters from their respective classes, and whirled them off in his car to see the favourite, Cameronian, win. Well done. Very educational indeed. But, as I say, I have never had such luck myself. In the evening my cousin Di and her husband stood us a dinner and a play; for my cousin Di has always remembered my birthday, just as I have always remembered hers. And the fourth anniversary incident was the sudden death of Peter, the yellow budgerigar's second or green wife. Again she was replaced, though again he hadn't seemed to miss her; but whether this third bride belonged to us or little Dorothy, nobody quite knew.

The season of Diana's hay-fever again. She never had this at all until we had been married about six or seven years, and then it seized her time after time with appalling violence. She went to all kinds of experts, and suffered all kinds of treatment, but no one ever got rid of it for her, though gradually she would seem slightly to have inoculated herself. The best thing that came out of it all—and even I don't pretend that it was worth it—was a mystical and minute pill, alleged to be of Chinese origin, which I took myself when I had an ordinary cold and couldn't breathe. A miracle then occurred, for the cold was completely suspended for about nine hours, even though it then returned exactly where it had left off. But one could sleep during those nine hours, and recover a little strength. Hats off to the Chinese, then, who have earned our gratitude not only for inventing Pekes.

But, between pills, poor Diana went through a great deal of discomfort every summer now, and 1931 was no exception to this very unnecessary rule. Yet the summer undertone in Church Street was still steadfast and strong. The sun-blinds were restored to the back of the house. The drawing-room windows stood open, and the sound of the little fountain came gently in. The children set off for their school in cotton frocks. The dogs were transported to their various Chelsea haunts. We dined with friends, we dined at little restaurants, and we played the new radio-gramophone—though I always shut the drawing-room windows first. And all morning, at any rate, I sat in my study, planning and toiling at a novel that was to be a kind of sequel to *Greenery Street*. Again it seemed that, through the medium of fiction, I wanted to crystallise a later phase

in our own lives. The Fosters, who in many ways so closely resembled the Mackails, were to be older now, though still younger than their counterparts. They were to have moved to a larger house, with two bathrooms—like our own. They were to have two children, also, though one, it appeared, was a little boy. Their first Peke, I discovered, was dead; but they, also, had got a girl Peke puppy—a mixture of Topsy and Victoria—instead. In other directions there was less resemblance, for Ian Foster was still in an office—from which I had escaped—and Felicity had a sister, while Diana was an only child. I pointed insistently to these facts when the last-named character showed signs of nervousness, because, she in her turn insisted, I was beginning to libel a number of real relations and friends. So to oblige her I softened or blunted these alleged portraits, and fiction again triumphed over truth. There was even less plot, I am afraid, than in the first part of the saga, for it was atmosphere, as they say, that I was aiming at; and this, for those who took the least interest in ordinary domestic existence, I think I eventually achieved. The Fosters' new address was in a street called *Peninsula Place*; and it was called this to indicate, in the author's mind, how a family at this stage can be so complete and self-contained a unit as almost to be on their own little island. As we were, and as I liked being, though of course I never wanted to be cut off from the mainland altogether. But in the thirties, which I was now on the point of leaving, it is everything, surely, to feel—even though one has no wish to bolt and bar it, and still less to have it bricked up—that one is safe behind one's very own front door.

As we were, at this point of time. With lots of friends, but absorbed in ourselves. With children whose exact whereabouts we still always knew. With two dogs to sleep quietly in the drawing-room after dinner—for dogs never seem to notice a radiogram, except when it, also, barks. And with impetus behind my pen still, though I still used the waste-paper-basket a good deal, and publishers and editors still ready and even anxious to keep me supplied with cheques. So the novel itself was to be called *Peninsula Place*, as it was, in the American edition, though for some reason it became *Ian and Felicity* at home. And thus, harmlessly and industriously, the London part of our summer once more slipped away.

Still, of course, my special fits of depression, the days when the novel seemed to go backwards rather than forwards, and often

enough a selection from my special brand of nightmares at night. I travelled, ceaselessly and disastrously, losing trains, luggage, and important bits of my clothes. Or I had arrived—I never knew how—in some remote part of the earth, and wept because I saw no chance of getting home again. Or I was murdered, but still couldn't wake up. Or air-raids had started again; a memory, as well as a prophetic vision, with which I could very well have dispensed. Or—perhaps this was the most frequent and painful of all—my father had ordered me to go back to school.

"But I'm grown-up!" I pleaded pitifully. "I'm married. I've got two children. I've got all this work on my hands."

He was quite inexorable, in this dreadful dream. And back—unless I could escape by waking in time—I had to go.

All these things happened to me in the night-time, I suppose, because I was myself. Because I flogged my imagination in the day-time. Because human beings have elected to walk on their hind legs, to turn away from nature, to rise, in a sense, above the beasts but with no chance of becoming angels, and to develop their brains, though they are quite unable to alter the size of their skulls. Perhaps one should think far more, then, or not at all. I don't know. I never have known. But I do know, for all that I have just written, that I was often happy enough in my thirties, at any rate when I was ostensibly awake. No, I shouldn't the least mind going back to that part again. If only I could.

July. Again I struggle into my original wedding garments, though they're getting a bit green and even, at last, just a little tight, and accompany my family to the Eton and Harrow match at Lord's. Having been at neither of these schools myself, I can't help noticing the extreme self-consciousness of the performers, and the very low level, in these circumstances, of the cricket. But I like the pageantry, the display of other people's best clothes, and the admirable luncheon provided for us by the Stricklands, in the arbours beyond the practice-ground. And always there is a chance of seeing J. M. B., looking forlorn and untidy—for nothing would induce him to put on the regular uniform—and then lighting up suddenly with what is still the most compelling of all smiles.

Two days later I am again in the same uniform myself. I hadn't meant to be. I have told Diana that I can't possibly leave my study

—for the novel is going badly to-day—even to attend an old friend's wedding. So she sets off without me; and then either the literary knot is resolved or an access of remorse takes hold of me. I rush into my striped trousers and tail-coat. I'm too late for the actual ceremony, but I tear off to the reception; and somehow manage to arrive there about ten minutes before the bridegroom and bride. The result is that as I step forward to greet them, from among a cohort of hired flunkies in this huge, hired house, I startle them so much, and make such an immense impression, that both will continue to assure me, for years afterwards, that I am the one feature of their wedding that they can remember. This wasn't my intention, of course; nor could I blame Diana for making a face at me when she saw me. But I recommend the notion, if they ever have weddings like that again, and if you should ever wish to be quite certain that you're not overlooked.

The school sports again, touching and preposterous as ever, and another meeting with the headmistress, though I still hope that her memory is worse than mine. A rare week-end visit with Diana—but I expect I made enough fuss about it—to friends in the Midlands, from where we drove over, on the Sunday, to see the outside of a house where she had lived before I knew her. How well I knew its name; and how often I had seen its photograph; but I think I was a little jealous of it, and though I examined my own emotions, it was obvious that they couldn't equal hers.

Then one more, farewell evening with the two Dorothys; and the end of term; and all off, for a preliminary fortnight after all, by the well-known route to Nonesuch. "The dogs," says Diana's entry, "mad with joy at being in the country."

Bless them. If they noticed the whiffs from the oil-works, they were far too well-bred to say so. If they heard the seaplanes roaring overhead—and with another Schneider contest in rehearsal the noise was more deafening than ever—they still didn't associate this with danger; and Topsy never would. There were her friends the toads again. There, for Victoria, were the thick carpets on which she particularly liked to roll. There, for both dogs, were a safe, luxurious garden; wide, comfortable beds—with a sofa across the foot of them, to which they could easily move in the dark; and the regular appearance of ample and well-cooked food. So they were happy, I think. For even if it would be hard to say what work they had done in



London, they knew well enough that this was their summer holiday.

Their owners bathed, basked, went out in the car—or in the motor-launch, once or twice, which still rang up at breakfast-time for orders—and otherwise indicated that they were having a holiday, too. It was a month of financial crisis in the outer world; starting in Germany, and then suddenly threatening the credit of this country as well; but only the experts, who had produced it, could really understand what was happening, and the Mackail family—or such parts of it as noticed anything at all—still felt that ultimately the experts must justify their name. The newspapers were trying to tell us what the Gold Standard meant, and perhaps if one had stuck to one newspaper one might have found this out. But at Nonesuch a whole sheaf of papers was delivered, and as I browsed among them I not only saw that the Gold Standard could be interpreted in a number of different ways, but that each interpretation was strongly coloured by party politics. Something was very wrong, it seemed, but there was no agreement as to either the cause or cure. My simpler mind put everything down to the fact that all Governments are habitually insolvent, and that none of them had the slightest wish, apparently, to be anything else. Mr. Micawber was right. One can't be happy if one spends more than one earns, and surely this was just as true when hundreds of millions were involved.

But Governments had developed their own ethics. When they did well, they called loudly for public praise. When they got into a muddle, their cry was all for public sacrifices. The one thing they could never do was to admit that they were mistaken, and as everyone knows now, this month ended by a Prime Minister remaining in office while virtually all his supporters changed sides. Noble fellow, said some. Traitor, said others. But up went the income-tax, and down came a lot of salaries, and still—whatever had happened to the Gold Standard—the same old game went on. Still there was a National Debt of seven thousand millions in what was supposed to be one of the two richest countries in the world. Some of the experts said that we should be lost without it. But I had a rough idea where I should be myself, if I balanced my own Budget like that.

Again, however, I could only read the newspapers and wait for the next blow. And, anyhow, I had contracted to rent that furnished house at Splashcliff for four weeks—at fifteen guineas a week—from

August 13th. So off we all set. Diana, the dogs, and myself in the Morris. And the children and their attendant in a series of south-coast trains. Our first act on arrival—as always, with every furnished house that we have taken—was to start stowing away the innumerable, fragile ornaments which the owners as invariably seemed to leave on every shelf and ledge; and by the time we had done this there wouldn't be much room for our own clothes. Never mind, though. The inventory (another guinea) looks much less alarming when once one has performed this feat. Presently—though one always doubts it at the beginning—we should be feeling far more at home. And in any case, this was independence again, or a close imitation of it, as poor Diana started ringing up the tradesmen.

Terrible weather, though. Heavy rain, and a south-westerly gale. The house rocked so violently over the first week-end that none of us slept at all, and as for bathing—well, it needed no warning from the local Council to keep us out of those waves. At one point they came dashing over the main road with such vigour that our principal entertainment, for several days, was to watch other people's cars breaking down and being slowly hauled away. It was a fortnight before Diana's book can record the first really fine day; and even this was only a rift in the otherwise almost constant clouds.

But we were happy. The children had cousins in the neighbourhood to play with. Anne had riding-lessons, and enjoyed them. We all attended a very innocent little Produce Show at a downland village which I shall henceforth call Rooklington. And Diana and I put on our raincoats and splashed about with the dogs. Victoria was in terrific form and spirits this August; so much so that for the first and last time in her life she chased a turkey right across a field. We rushed after her. The turkey ran into its private quarters. And then Victoria waved her tail, and pranced, and seemed to be calling for even larger and swifter quarry; while Topsy blinked patiently in the background. We were shocked, as well as just a little proud, but we spoke to the huntress sadly, and she never did it again. She wasn't really a sportsman, any more than I am. She had only had a passing impulse, such as can come even to lady Pokes, when a large bird suddenly runs away from them and they are only fifteen months old.

Something much more alarming, though, a few days later. It was a Sunday morning, and little Dorothy was now staying with us. In

the afternoon we were all going over to support her mother at a concert on one of the Brighton piers. But in the morning Victoria suddenly vanished.

Even to-day, after all that has happened to us, I don't know anything much worse than this. The first discovery that one's dog is missing. The hasty inquiries. The sinking feeling, turning quickly to panic, as each is received with a shake of the head. The garden fence was anything but dog-proof, but she had never attempted to stray from us before, and cars were dashing along the narrow road outside. We searched in every direction, but could see no small, ginger-coloured figure. And though we had known we were fond of her, never had we suspected such dreadful emotion as this. We called. We shouted. We went further and further afield. Diana rang up the police-station, and the thought of attending any concert this afternoon had become an affront and a torment.

We kept meeting each other, and asking the same question.

"Have you seen her?"

"No."

"Gosh, isn't this awful!"

Back to the search again. Powerful imaginations working overtime to produce one horrible vision after another. Memories not sparing us, for in this last year our little Victoria had shared to the very fullest in our lives. Where could she have gone to? What could she conceivably be doing now?

These problems must remain unanswered. After what was perhaps little more than an hour, but felt much more like a century, a kind neighbour suddenly appeared with Victoria in her arms. She had met her wandering about. She had identified her—which of course didn't surprise us—at once. Were we by any chance, she asked, looking for our little dog?

Heavens, the relief of it! Victoria's coat was covered with mud, so that some believe she had been down a rabbit-hole. But this was theory, and all that mattered was that she was back. We washed her, and brushed her, and hugged her, while she stared at us with more than oriental calm. We rang up the police-station again, where I can't say that they seemed particularly interested. And again, as the angelic Topsy still waited for a little attention, too, we besought the reckless Victoria to tell us where she had been.

But she couldn't, of course. She yawned in our faces, and presently

ate her own share of a hearty lunch. But whether she had learnt a lesson, or were sorry for us, or had now experienced all the iniquity that she wished to know, the fact remains that she never ran away again. A very good little dog indeed, henceforth. And a very enjoyable concert, after all, at the end of the Palace Pier.

More holiday amusements. A bathe or two, between the storms. Tennis with Diana's relations at their own summer headquarters about half a mile beyond Rooklington. In this minute hamlet we, too, had once rented a farm-house, and well we knew the road that led to it, and passed it, and then petered out into a track on the high downs. But other motorists were less well-informed. Totally disregarding the sign-post that said "No Through Road," they were determined that it was a short cut to Lewes, and when they found it wasn't, returned through Rooklington at twice their original speed. This made the cul-de-sac less peaceful than a map-reader might suppose. But in other ways it was still an astonishingly unspoilt spot. The rest of the coast was a mass of so-called development, still spreading and sprawling from month to month. But here, suddenly, was Sussex as I had known it in my childhood, for the land all belonged to one farmer, and so far no buyer had come along with his terms. The gentle outline of the downs was clean and clear, his sheep still cropped them, his ploughs still furrowed the lower slopes, and little Rooklington—with one shop and no inn—was hardly more than a group of cottages for the labourers who worked on his land. Once there had been a nobleman's mansion here, but now only its big, walled garden remained. And the rook-laden elms in what had once been its park; though every year now another big branch would come crashing to the ground.

Only one building really marred this paradise. A high, red, Victorian vicarage, perched by itself on a rise in the valley, and offending me so much every time I came here that I always tried to look the other way. It was empty now, for a benefactor and former resident had made over his own house—no beauty, either, but much less obtrusive, and also much nearer the lovely little church—to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, and the earlier eyesore was for sale. But of course no one would ever buy it. How could they, when it was as plain as all that? So I accelerated, and gazed at the downs again. For I was no prophet, in this direction, in the summer of 1931.

On the last day of August we all went to the Lewes races, but this

still didn't make me a sportsman. The setting, on the top of the hill there, was exquisite. I enjoyed my picnic lunch, and my share of the sloe gin. I liked the jockeys' colours, the polish on the horses, and I have always been fascinated by the tic-tac men. But I knew nothing of form, pedigrees, weights, distances, or anything else. So I kept on giving half-crowns to a man with a grey Homburg and a large moustache, more or less as the spirit moved me, and the end of the afternoon found me with a gross profit of eightpence. This shows, according to my theory, that I was comfortably though not extravagantly well off. And that, in the summer of 1931, was about correct.

Over to the Milnes next day, approaching them this time from the south instead of the north, and a return visit, by the Milnes to us, exactly a week later. The sands—not that there are any at Splashcliff—were running out, and our four weeks were nearly over. It had rained nearly all the time, and the rent was admittedly high for the small, flimsy house, and we had only had one real guest, because there wasn't really a spare bedroom. But again I knew I had enjoyed the temporary sensation of having a country residence of my own. It still didn't occur to me that one could have one all the year round—though I think it had to Diana—but ugly, blustering, bracing Splashcliff had once more served its purpose, as we all returned to the milder air of Nonesuch.

I started work again—on a Christmas story, though I generally found myself writing them in June or July—and three days later we did our best to appreciate the last Schneider affair. Some of us tried to watch it from the tower, while others went out in the motor-launch—where the wireless broke down, so that they returned in a very ignorant state. But there was little enough to observe. A loud noise, a speck flashing in the distance, and the commentators' remarks. One record-breaking pilot lost count of his circuits, came down for lack of petrol, and was no doubt as surprised as anyone to discover what he had done. Another, we were told, had touched four hundred miles an hour. Impressive? Unimaginable? Pointless? Ominous? Well, anyhow, the British—and Lady Houston—had won, the Italians hadn't even completed the course, and the hideous Trophy was now withdrawn from public competition for good. Perhaps we should all have felt prouder if the crisis hadn't been going so strong. But then I don't like flying-machines, and honestly I can't see why I should.

Back, by myself, to Church Street. We'd been having more decorating done, and because of this, and the goldfish, and the budgerigars, a caretaker had been occupying the premises. She was called Mrs. Slack, and now she would be looking after me as well, in a manner that utterly belied her name. One complication, though. She had a big, black dog, called Bruce, and since I am no bell-ringer, I used to communicate with her by opening the door at the top of the basement stairs and calling down.

"Mrs. Slack!" I would cry.

But it was always Bruce who came bounding up, and nearly knocked me down. It seemed to me that if I shouted "Bruce!" this might have the corresponding or complementary effect. But I tried this once, and the dog arrived with such additional fervour that I never tried it again. I crept down into the basement in person after that, or else waited until his owner appeared of her own accord. But there were no other complaints.

A letter from Diana at Nonesuch. Victoria, selecting a very low tide for the purpose, had repeated Topsy's great feat of swimming out to her mistress at sea. Diana had run splashing towards her, and according to her own evidence had only just got there in time. The pop-eyes were almost out of their sockets, as the poor little creature forged through the Solent. Caught, hugged, praised, cautioned, and dried. I was glad I had only heard of it after it was all over. And this, too, was something that never happened again.

Panic on the Stock Exchange. Great Britain off the Gold Standard. But I can't see anything about this in my account-book, and it doesn't seem to have stopped me paying a large number of quarterly bills. Was I frightened, or contemptuous, or just ignorant? I was working hard at short stories still, thinking of my unfinished novel, pottering about Chelsea by myself, and having most of my meals at Clubs. Missing my family enormously, yet knowing that though London was the real place for writing, the children must still have as much country in the summer as they could. An odd, annual, bachelor existence—except in my study, where concentration concealed everything except the daily task—which continued until September 25th, when I met Diana and Mary and the Pokes at Waterloo, and brought them all home in triumph. Anne and the nurse returned on the following day. And on the day after that—

how familiar it all looks—poor Diana went to bed with a cold. Autumn, in other words.

More cheques, for Ground Rent, Dentist, Water Rate, Insurance, Library, Doctor, Dancing-class, Garage, and of course the children's school. Who would be a parent and householder? Or who wouldn't, now that it was dark again after dinner, and the children were safe in bed, and the rest of us were again in our own, white drawing-room, after another day's work? Yes, in spite of the cheques, and the colds, and the crisis, we were still having a good deal of fun. More plays. More dinner-parties. More bills, if it comes to that. And then—oh dear, but of course we have both put it down in our records—Topsy's terrible illness.

A kind of paralysis in her back and hindquarters, yet with great pain, it was obvious, whenever she tried to move. No warning. It seized her suddenly, though she was only four, and in a moment she was the most pitiable and courageous creature on earth. Only her eyes could speak to us, and they showed so much more trust and confidence than it was possible to deserve or share. Mr. Batt was of course summoned at once; arrived; recognized and identified the symptoms; and prescribed what he said was the only treatment—minute doses of aspirin. "But," he added, "of course there are some dogs who can't keep it down."

Alas, Topsy was one of them. Again and again she did as she was asked, and swallowed her tiny fragment. The dawn of hope. And up it came once more. She looked at us. She could still just flicker the very end of her tail. But she was very, very ill.

Victoria had to go round the block without her, which she hated. She couldn't play that game of pouncing on her patient companion, and she hated that, too. But our thoughts, naturally, were with Topsy first, and though I still worked and Diana still had to run the house, we never left her. Four long days and nights of this, with all possible help and sympathy from Mr. Batt; and then at last there were the first signs of recovery. Her youth and character were going to save her. We breathed again. She was out of the basket now. Her appetite was beginning to return. Mr. Batt paid his final visit.

She was left with a kind of weakness and loss of elasticity that would remain for the rest of her life. She could still run—like light-

ning sometimes. She could still play. And her general health was as sound as ever. But there were certain attitudes that must always hurt her, and when she got into them by mistake, there would be one, brief, piercing yelp. If one picked her up now, she didn't, like Victoria, appear as boneless as a small, warm cushion. Her muscles were taut, as if to guard against that sudden twinge. Poor Topsy. But of course, and however foolish the unenlightened may think it, we were fonder of our sleek little head-dog than ever.

Though we had cancelled all plans during this other crisis, we felt justified in lunching with Dot, towards the end of the week, at a new Club to which she had invited us. It was in a mcws in May-fair. It was small. It specialized in *hors-d'œuvre*. It existed, in fact, entirely for eating and drinking, so that no one went there except at meal-times or the cocktail hour. But it was clean and amusing, we thought, and Diana said I must join it, too.

"Nonsense," I said. "I've got three Clubs already."

"But this," she said, "is different."

Quite true. And what use were two of my Clubs to her? Besides, the subscription was only two guineas a year, and we both knew that I could still afford that. So I was proposed by a friend, seconded by a stranger, and elected within a week. And now, for a while, it was our great place on the cook's night out, or if we were going to a play or film, or if we wanted to entertain on a small scale without fetching our acquaintances out to Chelsea. The waiters, who were dressed like stewards, all bore their names on little medallions, so that if one were a real *habitué* one could address them as "Henry" or "George." But *was* I a real *habitué*, or was Diana, either?

We liked to think we were. Yet somehow we never felt quite at home at the bar, and never really understood or entered the inner ring. The true members—I'm not thinking of Dot, who seldom re-appeared there—were idler and richer than we were. I rather think they were the remains of the Bright Young People. They weren't at all unkind to us, and neither was anyone else. Nothing, for instance, could have exceeded the civility and enthusiasm with which the staff came running out with glass jugs of water when I arrived one day with a radiator that had suddenly sprung a leak in the Park. But the place wasn't really meant for people with our sort of setting or home. It stimulated us for a bit, while we played, not altogether



successfully, at being more dashing than we were. Then, somehow, the intervals between our visits became longer and longer. And then, with other expenses and the need for economy, I suddenly decided that even two guineas was a sum worth putting to some better use. So I resigned. I became a simple, three-Club character again. And that, though we had some fun and *hors-d'œuvre* out of it, was the end of my experiences as a Mayfair Man.

October 27th. "Polling Day," says Diana's engagement-book. "Sat up till 3 listening to results." And this, of course, was the General Election that confirmed the new National Government in power; where it has been, under one leader or another, ever since. Majority of 500; unaffected, of course, by the fact that we had again voted for Sir Samuel Hoare, who would have been returned anyhow. But those broadcast results were stimulating, too. The electorate hadn't so much spoken as shouted, and surely now, whatever the real trouble had been, a Government with this kind of mandate would soon put everything right. So we were hopeful, if still a little mystified by it all. And the blind went on leading the blind.

November. Dinner with J. M. B. again. Reappearance in London of Plum Wodehouse and Leonora, though not in their own house, but in another mews in Mayfair. Meetings, of course, and with a new Pekingese puppy as well. Evenings in the mews. Evenings at Church Street. And one of the old, bachelor sessions at my most respectable Club. Entertainment this month included visits to the play of *Cavalcade* and the film of *Congress Dances*, which will help to date the epoch for some. And on the fourth of December, after a final spurt of about six weeks, I finished the first draft of my novel about Ian and Felicity. Good; at any rate in the sense that there were now two novels awaiting publication. Not so good in that I knew, well enough, that I had put far too much of myself and my surroundings into the second. Diana was frankly terrified by my revelations, for until the children started coming down in the evenings I still read her nearly everything I wrote. I tried to defend myself. I promised more modifications, which were eventually carried out. But there was a difference between *Greenery Street* and its sequel, as the public would instantly see. The sequel wasn't exactly a failure, but this time something had induced me virtually to appear in my own shop-window, and in a novel, of course, that's

nearly always a mistake. Achievement, therefore, already qualified by uneasiness. No rest for the pen, though. Back on to the short stories at once.

And Christmas approaching. Diana doing all my shopping for me as usual, in the intervals between steering the children through heavy, seasonable colds, or, as they recovered, taking them out to the first Christmas parties. Another evening with J. M. B. at the Adelphi, more or less in honour of Peter Davies's engagement. As I had never met the bride before, I couldn't very well sympathize with her on what I was pretty certain was an ordeal; though I did this long afterwards, and found that I had been quite right. She sat close beside her twin sister, whom I didn't know, either; while J. M. B.—though the big room was full of other guests—continued to smoke and to march to and fro. And nobody, of course, had the faintest thought of the biography.

Christmas itself; the last—though we didn't know this, either—at Nonesuch. The traditional hospitality. The customary surfeit. The three generations all under one roof again. Topsy not much enjoying the cold weather. Victoria, as always, and like Rufus, finding it very much to her taste. Diana's father gives me a box of cigars, which will produce a considerable effect when I am being hospitable myself later on. Divorce from the Gold Standard doesn't seem to have affected the standard of living here, and he doesn't look particularly worried. But though we are always polite to each other about finance and literature, these are only token bridges that we appear to cross. Not, in all probability, that he isn't better-read than I am, and certainly he has done far more credit to Balliol; but of course he doesn't really want me to discuss my own technique with him, and more than I dream of asking him what exactly it is that he does in the City. Secretly, perhaps, each wonders how the other manages to make a living, but I have a great respect for him, and I'm not at all sure, sometimes, that he hasn't traces of respect for me. So we smoke, and keep the ball rolling for a bit, until he goes off to play six-pack bezique with his wife, and I enjoy a transplanted domestic evening with mine. Her mind is very much on string, paper, and little Christmas labels from Woolworth's, for her generosity will always be as thorough as it is genuine and sincere. The fact that we are ninety-six miles from our real home, and have both dressed for dinner, doesn't alter Diana. And here is some-

one who knows everything about me from some way before A to a very long distance after Z.

It was a short visit, though—little more than a long week-end—that we spent here at the close of 1931. The children had engagements in London, I was champing to be back at my desk, and we were all in Church Street again on a very swift rebound. Again we were on what I must always consider the right side of our green front door. But on the very last day of the month and year a new inmate arrived to join us as well.

The incorrigible Diana, in other words, came home at lunch-time with a bullfinch in a small wooden cage. Of course it was instantly put into a very large wire one, and supplied with everything for which a bird, in such circumstances, could hope. But of course I had been given no warning of this purchase, and of course I must bring out my own point of view.

"Haven't we got enough pets already?" I asked.

"I've always wanted a bullfinch," said Diana.

"They oughtn't to be kept in cages," I said.

"But this one was born in a cage," said Diana. "Of course I asked that before I bought him."

Yes, and of course the shop had known what answer to give.

"He's got a little bracelet on his leg," said Diana. "That proves it."

He had, indeed; and how often I longed to take it off—for birds shouldn't wear bracelets—though I never did, because I was always afraid of breaking his tiny little ankle. As for the proof, I did my utmost to accept it. For here he was, we couldn't turn him out into a London winter, and there could be no doubt that he was a very good-looking fellow indeed. Presently he would begin singing—enchantly, to my mind—and at breakfast-time I would encourage him and join him in little duets. Presently, also—though he never seemed to like being let out of his cage, so that after some attempts we gave this notion up—he became quite tame enough to take a hemp-seed off the end of my finger. I must have handed him hundreds, if not thousands, like this, during the years that he shared our home. And have peeled grapes for him, at the right seasons. And have brought him in cherry-blossom from the garden. Though always, of course, it was Diana who did so much more for him than anyone else. Everything, in fact, except whistling to him. Though I think it was she who discovered how much he liked the

gramophone, so that over and over again there were special performances entirely for his behoof.

As for his name, we decided, on that very first day, that he was to be called John Bull, and officially this would always remain the correct form of address. But though we meant to speak of him as Johnnie, for short, and did for quite a while, slowly but surely a strong tradition brought him a still more conventional name. We couldn't help it, and the staff, from the very beginning, never dreamt of calling him anything else. He became "Bully." It couldn't be avoided. Never was there a less blustering or tyrannous character, and in that sense it was ridiculously inapt. But forty years earlier there had been a bullfinch called Bully in the first of all my homes, and still it seemed that in practice it was all that a bullfinch could ever be called.

So we loved that little bird, and did our best for him, and you'll be hearing of him again. His cage stood on a little table to the left of the dining-room window—except when I carried it through the drawing-room for his special gramophone or wireless sessions—and there he bathed, and hopped about, and ate, and drank, and sang. Diana gave him clean sand, and fresh seed and water every morning, and other delicacies as often as they could be procured. He was a very good boy from beginning to end, he made our house even more of a home than it had been already, and to tell the truth I was very nearly as fond of him as if he had been a dog. Peace to his little memory. If I shut my eyes now, and put out my finger, I can still feel that gentle, trusting peck.

And that was the end of 1931. Two novels, as I have said, had been completed, though for the first year since the very beginning of it all no novel by the author whom I knew best had been published in this country. Sixteen short stories for the monthly magazines. The usual sprinkling of articles. That was the literary or professional side of it all; and for the rest, as chance would have it, my best financial year had coincided with a panic on the Stock Exchange and the narrowest escape—or so we had all been told—from national bankruptcy. I was grateful, puzzled, and still plugging away. I had felt the draught, though so far I had been sheltered from it. I had paid my bills and put a good deal aside, all as though a world in which one did this would reward one

with security in return. So far from even nibbling at the established order, I had gone out and voted for Sir Samuel Hoare.

Well? I should be forty before this next year was over, and my children would be thirteen and ten. Nothing in this, perhaps, of a necessarily fatal nature, yet more than ever those midnight bells and hooters saddened me as I lay there in the dark. I couldn't help it, whether this were infection from the world-currents that were entirely beyond my control, or just part of the penalty of being my individual self. But of course I couldn't possibly avoid being my individual self, either. There was no one to take over that responsibility, however unreasonably and unworthily I could still quell all dawning thoughts of this nature—by merely patting them or addressing them by name—in my two, pathetically trustful dogs.

## CHAPTER VI

1932

THE beginning of January, 1932, shows not only the customary assaults on my bank balance by the forces of order and civilization, and an indication that I was already starting yet another novel, but includes a reference to another unforgettable film. René Clair's *Le Million*, with its charming music and fresh, funny treatment, was what everyone was flocking to see just now. So Diana and I had dinner at Pagani's—heavens, the size and variety of their *Fritto Misto!*—and went on to the Academy Cinema, too. And laughed. And my elder sister, who accompanied us, gave me the score afterwards, and I tried to play it on the piano; though perhaps—for it wasn't at all easy—this gave me more pleasure than anyone else.

Otherwise, it was still the children and their parties that were in the foreground. Anne's own birthday-party on the twelfth, with fourteen contemporaries and some older onlookers, and a series of competitions run so unsparingly by Diana that her entry for the next day just says: "Worn out. Did nothing." But on the next evening we were all celebrating the birthday again. A family outing, with the addition of little Dorothy, to a sumptuous revue at the Hippodrome. In an access of generosity or grandeur, I had hired

a large car from my Chelsea garage; and then we all had to go in a taxi, because it had been kept by a previous client and never turned up. However, it was there when we emerged from the Hippodrome, and took us all on, first to see Dot, who had been sustaining the rôle of Dick Whittington at the Garrick, and then back for eggs and bacon at her flat. Quite a night, I can tell you. And half-a-crown for the chauffeur, even though he had let us down.

Another party next day; given by Anstey Guthrie, who was of course F. Anstey, of *Vice Versa*, though even he didn't know for what name that initial stood. The legend was that it was the result of a printer's error when he had first taken to writing, and had tried to call himself T. Anstey, because his first real name was Thomas. But in any case that wasn't the only legend. He was seventy-four now, but he had been giving an annual children's party for so many years that I had attended part of the series as a child myself. In those days he lived in a flat near Hanover Square, so that we started off with a long drive in a four-wheeler which I swear had sometimes a nineteenth-century carpet of straw. When we got there, there were games, a tremendous tea—with vast quantities of crackers that I must confess were a torment to one nervous guest—and then, believe it or not, a film was shown. Yes, we saw a train coming into a station and a large wall falling down—these pictures were always reversed afterwards, which made them, if possible, even more entertaining than before. And we saw the astronomer who performed all those early miracles and tricks. And a comic family setting out in a primitive motor-car, which, of course, eventually blew itself to bits. And why we, too, weren't burnt to death when these highly inflammable films were being exhibited in a bachelor's overcrowded sitting-room was perhaps also a miracle, now that I look back. But we weren't. We were wrapped up, put in another four-wheeler, and taken back to Kensington. And apart from the crackers—though I was far from despising their contents—I had again had the time of my life.

Then I grew out of the parties, and it seems possible that they were interrupted during the first round of the twentieth-century war. But in 1932, though the host had moved to a studio-flat near Holland Park, the series was still going strong. Children of the original children received their invitations now, were brought there,

played games, had tea, pulled crackers, and saw a suitable film. Indeed, one of the few differences now was that the risk of its bursting into flames had been removed. Progress, you see. But Anstey Guthrie had been small and bald even in the nineties, and of course these aren't characteristics that are likely to change. And he had been shy then, and he was still shy. But he had been kind, too, and what could be kinder than that a bachelor of seventy-four should still be giving juvenile parties like this? Very touching, I thought, as my own children set off there, and returned, flushed and not quite so tidy, with a collection of jewellery and musical instruments from the crackers. I salute the memory of Anstey Guthrie, too. His spark of genius flickered after some of its earlier triumphs, he knew this, but was never soured by it, and was still generous to younger authors like myself. *Vice Versa. Voces Populi. The Man from Blankley's*. And those children's parties. A pretty fine record, I think, to have left behind.

My telephone rang that afternoon, and I answered it, and suddenly some impetuous American accents were addressing me by name. "I'm Charles Macarthur," said the speaker. "Ned Sheldon told me to try and see you. I've just flown over from Germany, and I'm sailing for New York to-morrow. Can you and your wife have dinner with me at my hotel?"

I accepted at once, though Diana was still out, for though I had never met him before—but I knew about his partnership with Ben Hecht, and I'd read *The Front Page*—the main point, at the moment, was the other name that he had mentioned. And Diana knew and shared all my feelings about Ned. Or Edward Sheldon, in other words—it appeared now that he and Macarthur were some sort of connections by marriage—who is such a very special character that again I must go right back into the past.

To 1913 or thereabouts, when I had left Oxford, and was a bit of a problem to myself and others, yet was earning some money—there may be more, perhaps, about this afterwards—by designing and furnishing scenes for the stage. I don't know that I was very good at this, but as I was employed by Barrie and Shaw within the first few months, it is at least clear that I had my share of luck. Then one day, when I was at Mrs. Patrick Campbell's, Ned Sheldon came to see her, too. He was young then, though a few years older than myself; he was already, so I was told, a very successful

American playwright—though he still hadn't had his long London run with *Romance*; he had the most charming and understanding manner, a deep and curiously attractive voice, and within two minutes or so I had decided that he had just got to be my friend.

My luck was still in, or something in my innocent expression must have appealed to his generous heart. He asked me to come and see him. He commissioned some more scene-designs, which were executed and immediately paid for, though I am ashamed to say that they were never used. And presently, when I rather surprisingly found myself in New York, he not only continued to shower kindnesses on me, but put me up as his guest for weeks on end.

Then I returned to England, though we still corresponded. And then, one day, he wrote to me from a hospital in Chicago, but without attempting to explain what he was doing there. I remember, and am horribly ashamed of this, too, that I asked him—for his letter had shown no trace of anxiety—if he had suddenly become a surgeon. But he hadn't, of course. This was the beginning of the long and appallingly incapacitating illness which no other spirit on earth, I am quite sure, could ever have survived. But he didn't tell me this. He never once referred to it. I learnt of his condition from others, and the correspondence, and the plays, too—though he could no longer write with his own hand, nor read what anyone had written—went on as before.

In the autumn of 1925, I was back in New York on a very short visit—with a wife this time—and we dined with him twice. He couldn't see us, he could hardly move in his bed, and it was the guests who did all the eating and drinking, as he lay there talking gaily and cheerfully of everything except his own health. As he laughed. As he discussed books and plays which could only have been read to him. As he spoke of friends whom he had seen recently, though in truth it was only they who had seen him. And as he remained, by the most triumphant victory of courage over disaster, exactly the same Ned that he had been when the whole visible world was at his feet. Nobody, of course, has ever known anything like it.

Then—with Diana by now completely under his spell as well—we re-embarked for England, and until I return to America—which at present seems more unlikely than ever—I can only dream of sitting and talking with him again. But the correspondence has always gone on, even though his end of it has consisted mostly of telegrams;



I have continued to tell him about my family, and my dogs, and my thoughts; and several times I have been able to communicate through what one might call ambassadors. Friends, that is to say, on their way to New York, who looked baffled and even obstinate at first, when I asked them to call on an invalid; yet have then returned to report that they have never had such a happy and uplifting experience in their lives. The Milnes did this, and Ian Hay, and little Dorothy—with a husband by then. And Ned knew exactly what they looked like, without my ever telling him, for he can do this now whenever he hears a voice. I'm not at all sure that he can't read our thoughts as well. But they're never unworthy in his presence, because he always makes everyone feel good. His visitors come away and say "I can't believe in God now," or "Now I believe in God." But both statements mean exactly the same thing. That they've been overwhelmed by his courage and the extraordinary sweetness that goes with it, and that all previous notions about everything have received a pretty severe jolt.

So Diana and I went to dinner with Charles Macarthur, at the Carlton Grill-Room, on his one night in London, and we liked him very much. I don't know what he made of us, for he was obviously under a good deal of strain of some sort—as I should most certainly have been if I had just stepped off an aeroplane and were on the point of boarding a liner. All this, however, he told us that he had undertaken because he had suddenly felt that his tether was snapping at home. He had regarded this brief and wild expedition as a rest-cure, though so far it had left him in such a state that it was I who had to order the dinner. Too clever, of course. Too much the victim of his own electric nationality. Yet anything but beaten, judging by his subsequent activities and output. And charmingly friendly, as we sat there and talked about Ned. Then the meteor flashed out of our orbit, and I have never seen nor heard from him again. But it was a very queer, interesting evening, for all that.

Back to the parties. Mary's turn this time, with eight slightly older contemporaries, with Diana again running the games and competitions, and presenting the prizes, but with Anne—compare, here, the approaching end of so many Christmas holidays—bowled over by the excess of entertainment, and retiring to bed. And then Diana collapsed. And then—so perhaps there is some point in them, after all—the school started again, revelry was suspended, and both in-

valids returned to a steadier and less exhausting method of life. The bread-winner, of course, had had no holiday at all; except in so far as revising a novel is easier than writing one. Though this—also of course—was what still seemed to suit the curious creature best.

Oh dear! One of Diana's celebrated and apparently inevitable falls. I wasn't there this time, not that I could have saved her if I had been, for there is never any warning as her ankle turns and there she suddenly is on the ground. Dreadful moments for a husband and eye-witness, torn between indescribable anxiety and something that no less inevitably looks like rage. What awful shocks I've had like this, as I help my wife to her feet again, with a glimpse of yet another lacerated stocking; if, indeed, her blood isn't flowing as well. No amount of experience can stop me asking her why she has done it, and then scolding her as if she had done it on purpose. This is because I am so fond of her, of course, though you mightn't think so at the time. And after a few seconds I swear I'm as helpful as anyone in such circumstances can be. But of *course* it's a shock for me, too.

On this particular morning, at the end of January, while I was still working away in my study, she fell down in Church Street and dropped a parcel of six new gramophone-records as well. They were all broken, of course, and as she presented herself, bruised and limping, in my study, it was that part of the accident that seemed to have vexed her most. I had to split my sympathy. I had—though this was impossible—to register the customary appearance of fury (which was really my heart being wrung), while somehow making it plain that I wasn't the least angry about the records; in fact, that this was a matter for commiseration on less passionate grounds. The result was that I pulled some horrible faces, made some very uncouth noises, and probably produced no suggestion of sympathy at all. These awful things that happen in ordinary, everyday life. Diana's own rage, now I come to think of it, whenever I cut my finger or bumped my head. Any onlooker or listener would have said that sympathy, at these particular domestic junctures, was the very last thing that either partner felt. But they would have been quite wrong, of course. We were both racked by each other's sufferings. Yet, of course, the only way to express this surge of emotion was to sound angry; and in my case, in all probability, to start using foul language as well. The ritual was

so well-established, though, that I think it really brought us both relief. For we did understand each other, so far as two human beings ever can.

There was another development from the same mischance. Gradually, as with the rest of the world, we had come to believe that a steady supply of new gramophone-records was part of a civilized life. But if Diana were going to drop them in the street like that, then it was time I took over this side of the housekeeping myself. So I did. The monthly lists now came to me regularly by post; I ordered anything up to a dozen—blindly, or perhaps I should say deaffly, on some mystical system of my own; they arrived; we played them, and either liked them or didn't; and it was thus that my subsequently vast collection began. Very extravagant, because of course I had to buy cases, too, so that eventually the whole corner by the gramophone became a mass of them. Sometimes, indeed, I wondered if this growing accumulation wouldn't drive us into a larger house. But the war stopped that; though it was all—except for the months when my system landed us with a batch of failures—quite good fun at the time. The children seemed to approve. The dogs raised no objection. And the bullfinch was always delighted to accompany the livelier of the new tunes. Which brings us to February 1st. And to Diana again.

Ever since that bird had graced our dining-room she had been exerting herself to please him. And now, having read in a book somewhere that no bullfinch could be happy without a mate, she had gone off and ordered one. This wasn't so easy; for in the first place there is little or no market for lady bullfinches—owing, no doubt, to their comparatively colourless plumage—while in the second place she had again insisted that the bride should have been born in captivity. Whether or not this was actually the case was still, of course, a matter of assertion rather than proof. But a bride was produced; she was said, poor little thing, to have been imported from Germany; and whether because of this, or because of her unthinkable journey, her arrival, on the first of February, brought little sunshine into the house.

She moped in the other big cage—for a closer introduction to her fiancé was as yet thought inadvisable. And then, as she brightened a bit, and as we put them together, though Johnnie would have treated her with courtesy itself, Janey (as we had decided to call her)

almost immediately developed the most violent temper. She flew at her companion until he lay on the sand and trembled. The only possible course was to separate them again, and though Johnnie appeared ready to repeat the experiment—for love, as has been noted, is a very strange affair—whenever we tried to oblige him, exactly the same thing happened again. Henceforth, therefore, each bird had its own vast cage in the dining-room, on either side of the bow window with the witch-ball; the book would seem to have been quite wrong; and no closer association ever took place. The angelic Johnnie, or Bully, still sang and took hemp-seed from our fingers. The pathetic Janey was still silent, and pulled angry faces at us if ever we tried to feed her in the same way. But there she was. We had made ourselves responsible for her, and we weren't going to let her down. Diana cleaned both cages every morning, and procured a double supply of delicacies, and we still wooed her with every wile in our power. No good, though. She didn't like us, though she didn't pine exactly and showed no wish to fly round the room. A dull bird? We wouldn't say so, though even the gramophone gave her no pleasure; for we felt guilty as well as disappointed. And rightly. Of course, one oughtn't to keep birds in cages at all. But we'd done it, and there was no immediate solution for poor Janey. Though presently, or just possibly, there would be.

On the day after her arrival my novel *David's Day* was published. This was the one that contained something like fourteen different plots all threaded together and occasionally crossing each other, and all showing the vast though unsuspected influence of a humble, new-born baby, whose birth had accidentally set the wheels spinning, but who only appeared himself—and fast asleep at that—on the final page. Rather a feat, in a way. I'm not ashamed of it, though perhaps I should have realized that it required rather more concentration from library-subscribers than some of them were prepared to give. But it wasn't a failure, and I have traced its influence—I don't think altogether mistakenly—in a number of subsequent works. Of course, there was still the secret part of me that speculated, for about five minutes on the eve of publication, on the remote chance of having written something that would, as the publishers say, "break loose." And *David's Day* didn't; and no doubt there would only have been an illusion of triumph and happi-

ness and many temptations for the author, if it had. So no complaints, as having finished the revision of its successor now, I immediately returned to the short stories. And as one of Ernest Shepard's very best pictures went off to the frame-maker's, and then joined the slightly self-centred collection on my walls.

More about birds. Diana and I—just a week after Janey's arrival—setting off, in the Morris, for the Crystal Palace, where a big exhibition was being held. We had seen an announcement, and birds were rather on our minds, but as a matter of fact that vast assemblage of cages, and that pitiful chorus of chirrups and squeaks, proved oppressive rather than stimulating, and tended to cast us both down. But the Crystal Palace didn't. It was something like thirty years since I had been taken there, when of course I had been much too young to appreciate its exquisite ugliness and nostalgic air of faint decay. But Diana is always an amateur of Victorianism, and for me, too, there was an outburst of romance now as we gazed at its vistas, inspected its strange collection of plaster casts, eyed its antique slot-machines, and sniffed up its queer scent of dust and very old gravy. I was deeply distressed that it was no longer symmetrical, for fire had destroyed one end of it in 1866, and there had never been funds to restore what had gone. But I profoundly appreciated all that was left of it, and determined there and then to be one of the first to write an article for its centenary in 1951. A vain thought, for in less than five years only its hideous towers and a mass of twisted wreckage would remain. And in just over nine more years even the towers would have been brought to the ground.

A cold February, with London snow. I wrapped up and set out for lunch at my literary-theatrical Club, and was still on the top of an omnibus in the King's Road when I saw the placard of an early evening paper. "Edgar Wallace dead." There was an extra sense of chill; for not only had he become a symbol of the era in his lifetime—so that a very large and crowded page was now turned—but I, too, had lapped up his books and stories, and there were personal memories as well. He was Plum's friend, and Dot's friend, far more than he had ever been mine. But I had met him, and some of his family, considerably more than once. He gave me the pleasant

impression that he rather liked me, and I had certainly liked him.

"Hullo," he would say, narrowing his eyes as though that long cigarette-holder weren't sending all the smoke into mine; "how's the author?" And then, to any bystander who happened to be present: "This is the man who writes *real* novels. I'm only one of these hacks, you know." Flattering, though we both knew that he was pulling my leg. Yet touching, now that I thought of it again, for with all his gifts and industry and astonishing success, he had still been humble enough to make this half-rueful joke. I thought, as professionals will, of the transparent joy with which he used unfamiliar words; like Pinkerton with "hebdomedary." I knew of his frank admiration, quite untempered by a comparison of incomes, for those who had been brought up with them. He had supposed, though he was quite wrong, that I was a highbrow, and he'd had to make that inverted boast because of his true respect for the mystery of our craft. Having made it, he generally added that he was going to ring me up in a day or two and ask me to lunch. But I can't say that he ever did; and I can't really see how he could have, in the midst of an output like that. I continued to like him, though. He was obviously proud of being Edgar Wallace, but it was a simple pride that could only give pleasure to others, too. Now he had died, five thousand miles away in Hollywood, and I felt a pang on the top of that bus. There was a lot of Dumas in his curious character, and though I shan't press this comparison, I'm not going to withdraw it. I think if they could have exchanged epochs, it wouldn't necessarily have been Dumas who would have earned the greater name.

More work for me, meanwhile, and more meetings with friends. An evening of inky talk, at that same club, with J. B. Priestley; very assured on the surface, and who am I to say that this quality didn't go down to bedrock—except that I'm an author myself, and know that writing, thinking, and doubting are all facets of the same queer job. As a reviewer—which is something that I have never been myself—he has praised me and damned me; and I remember that after one of the damnings he took the trouble to tell me that he had only done it because he couldn't do anything else. So I thanked him; thus hiding my sensibility at the moment when he revealed his own. But I didn't think less of him, and should

always be glad to talk ink with him again, though it is a long time now since our two orbits have crossed.

Thus February ended, and as icily as it had begun, so that Topsy still shivered and raced back to the front door, while Victoria would willingly have gone twice if not three times round the block. But spring was presumably coming, and relying on this, though in ignorance as yet of something else, I see that I celebrated the first of March by ordering some new suits. Yes, in the plural, though I dare say there were only two. But if so, I know there were two pairs of trousers for each, since this was still my lordly habit—I had once heard that it was an economy, though at the present moment it sounds more like a miracle—in 1932. It would be weeks, of course, before I got them; and always, after what I had hoped was the last fitting, they would undergo some mysterious tightening process which would result in my having to take them back. You think I was getting fat, do you? But I wasn't. A contemporary photograph has just fallen out of Diana's engagement-book which shows that I was still remarkably thin. The fact was that all tailors must have kept a Tightener in those days; though neither I nor the friends with whom I used to discuss his activities could ever imagine why.

And then, after some hesitation, and even deliberate deviation, I fear, we come—in this part of my own story—to almost the first of its sharper and sterner blows. Perhaps you will think I was too lucky, so far. Perhaps I was. Or perhaps, again, there is no such thing as luck. But it was in March of this year that another cold wind began blowing, with a sudden, sensational gust, and that our own apparent security was revealed as at the hazard of forces as far away as Paris, and New York, and Italy, and Scandinavia. Diana's father was showing enormous patience and courage, as well as the very highest sense of honour; but the gust had become a financial tornado, and in the first lull during which anything at all could be discovered at our end of Church Street we learnt that his whole position and situation had changed. It wasn't ruin in the sense that he wouldn't still be much richer than his son-in-law. But the Golden Age which we had never really quite understood, yet in which, for something like ten years now, we, too, had been privileged to bask, had ended and could never return. Nonesuch was to be given up—that is to say, if the landlord could be persuaded to break the lease. The big house and garden in Chelsea, where our

children had had their dances and parties, and where we had lunched nearly every Sunday in London since our days on Campden Hill, was going to be abandoned, too. The cars and chauffeurs, the motor-launch and its crew, would soon only exist in memories and photograph-albums. Life had suddenly turned into a chapter in a novel, and Diana and I looked at each other and wondered if we were stunned.

I don't think we were, though. Perhaps we still couldn't quite believe it. And then again, though, of course, we had profited from the Golden Age, and had shared in a great deal of its generosity, our own standards had never risen to anything approaching its heights. If Diana had been an heiress, neither of us had started living on her expectations; so that if she were an heiress, in that sort of sense, no longer now, we were only, perhaps, theoretically worse off. Without that sometimes almost overwhelming background behind her, I might have saved more than I actually had; but it hadn't stopped me working, and to-day, of course, it makes precious little difference whether one has saved or not. To-day, if it comes to that, she wouldn't be an heiress even if this crash had been postponed until everyone else had lost their money, too. But it was disturbing. It wasn't at all what we had expected or had been led to expect. For even if one has never lolled on a comfortable sofa, one may still like to feel that it is there in the next room. Or, again, it is notoriously easier to walk on a tight-rope a few inches from the ground than to face the knowledge that it is spanning a chasm, and that there is no net down below.

So I rather wished I hadn't ordered those new suits. And for a few days—it can't have been many, for I wrote three stories (including a Christmas story!) that March—there were admittedly moments when my attention wandered from my work, and when I gazed not so much at my own characters as at some rather alarming visions of my family and myself. But Diana was wonderful. And her parents were wonderful. And after all we had lost nothing yet that could be measured in any actual terms. So that soon not only my work but the rest of the daily round was going on very much as before. Changes were coming, of course, but if the principal sufferers could face them like this, then, of course, we could face them, too. A lot of people had probably been thinking for years that I had been sponging when I hadn't been sponging, so that



now, perhaps, they would treat me with more respect. There may have been a flaw in this reasoning, since respect, in our complicated society, isn't necessarily withheld from successful spongers. But never mind. The bomb had gone off, but I was still alive, and solvent, and with plenty of work to do. So I huddled over it again, while Diana began helping her mother with house-hunting, and in a hundred other ways; and much of the old rhythm, in our own establishment, was almost immediately resumed.

We went to an evening party at one of my publishers', where I was photographed—looking bald and drunk, though I was neither—by a man with a candid camera. And the Hopwoods came to dinner again. And whether because of the shadow hanging over us or not, we seem to have made a particular fuss this year of Mary's birthday. We took both children to a musical play at the Gaiety. Diana took them both to *Cavalcade*. And I seem to have provided a distinctly generous tip for the heroine of the occasion as well. If any of this had been done to defy the Fates, they still didn't hit back at us. Though they still hadn't changed their minds about anything that they had done elsewhere.

By a scholastic and medical freak, the children's Easter holidays started two days earlier than expected; their headmistress having suddenly developed German measles herself. And then—April now—there were more colds and temperatures at 107, Church Street, too. But in the middle of the month we all went down to Nonesuch for ten days, quite in the old style; while—quite in the old style, also, but we weren't going to alter our own plans yet—our builder repainted the drawing-room, and made a new window in it (from my own design) as well. Nonesuch seemed to glitter in a new light, now that the days there were ending. I thought of the beginning, when it had been practically a ruin. I thought of all that had been lavished on it, and on the grounds and gardens, and wondered if the landlord would ever find another tenant to keep them up on that scale. And I thought about the four donkeys, though of course their owners hadn't forgotten them, either. But still there was much of the original unreality about this queer, sprawling pavilion, and its useless though decorative tower. Had I ever really believed in their existence, and wasn't it much more likely that they would just vanish, like a dream, when we left?

Well, they may have by now—if not exactly like a dream—for oil-works and seaplane-bases are dangerous neighbours in war-time. But I wasn't thinking of that in the first year of the National Government; though I was thinking of its Budget, of which Diana has noted "Nothing any better." This meant, I suppose, that they were aiming at solvency, which they haven't exactly achieved yet. It also meant five shillings in the pound income-tax, but I was still such a mug or patriot that I thought it was being spent to some purpose. Mathematical agony over my own return; in respect of which I was also such a mug—let's leave patriotism out of it this time—that I still wasn't charging anything for my professional expenses. The form didn't mention them, the Inspector had never told me about them, and it was only when I came to employ an accountant later on that I discovered what can really happen when one does up the drawing-room. Amazing, pitiable, and fantastic innocence. However, as we're all ruined now, it doesn't really matter.

Here, anyhow, at the end of the month were the shining white walls and ceilings, the scarlet picture-rail—another of my ideas—the new window, bringing light into a hitherto dark corner, and some new and ingenious lights for the pictures. Very extravagant. Ghastly bill from the builder—but he'd already been paid half in advance, and got the balance on the nail. Sixty pounds for the head-mistress, which ought to have covered the cost of her German measles. Sixty-five pounds for Diana, on account of her regular screw. No, I don't seem to have been behaving with undue economy this season, whatever the clouds in the sky. Mad? Reckless? Hopelessly unbusinesslike? Or just an author still spending what he could still afford? I don't know now. I can't imagine writing cheques like that. But I did, I suppose, for there are the counterfoils. And surely it can't *all* have been a dream. . . .

May. Hullo! Here I am in a very different character. Mean, now, some people would say, for of course I ought to have given my old clothes to the needy; instead of which I have sold them to a delightful man in the King's Road for four pounds. Diana got ten shillings of this for ringing him up, but it was easily earned, in a way, for there was no bargaining. I laid out a collection in the dining-room. The man came, took them away, and left the

money. Perhaps I hadn't exactly earned it, either, but all I can say is that I've never known money that made me feel so rich. I regarded and treated it as a windfall from Heaven, all other signs of meanness immediately left me, and for a day or two there was a complete illusion that I was getting everything that I bought for nothing. I see that Plum Wodehouse shared in it this time, for there was another evening at my venerable Club, where neither food, drink, nor cigars were spared. Splendid. I was a millionaire for the moment. I always was, in the days when Topsy was Consul, whenever I sold my old clothes.

Dear Topsy. Active again in this warmer weather, though Victoria gasped and lay on the parquet floor. Out with us, under the green trees, in the various parks and gardens. Waving her tail. Dashing past us, in a manner that was generally known as the Pekingese Express. But stopping sometimes, and looking puzzled, as a twinge still caught her poor little hind legs. Coming definitely into the story, though, towards the end of May, when I lunched for the first time with an editor, and was delighted to find that he wanted to talk about dogs.

Yes, I meant that about the first time, though perhaps it sounds rather eccentric when my score of short stories was now a hundred and eighty-three. But as a matter of fact I'd only met one once before, which was at Plum's, as you may remember, in the summer of 1928; and that had been a mere accident or chance. I had an agent, you see, and the agent did everything—except, as I sometimes regretted, the actual work at my desk; so that but for Plum, and but for this other editor's curiosity or kindness, I might never have met one at all. I was convinced that if he once saw me, the whole of this profitable part of the game would be up; for naturally he would have supposed that I was gay and cheerful, or even witty, and if I am ever any of these things—which is very doubtful—it is never at one o'clock. Fragments of fiction—I was struggling with my fourteenth novel now—still cling to me like bits of cotton-wool. I am remote, moody, dreary, and as often as not exceedingly depressed. In fact, the whole outlook, as I approached our meeting-place that day, struck me as ominous and black.

And then two things saved me. The first, perhaps, was that the editor's notion of lunch for a contributor was my notion of a bump-supper. And the second was a most fortunate reference

to Topsy and Victoria. As the wine flowed, that editor's eyes glistened, and he began telling me about his own dogs. Since I was still expatiating on mine, there was a good deal of uproar at Simpson's in the Strand, though not so much that the editor couldn't order further beakers and goblets in honour of our absent friends. I left the premises in an exalted condition, and without—so far as I could remember—ever having mentioned his magazine or my stories at all. But it must have been all right, for he continued to employ me. There was still plenty of paper, for both of us, in those days.

Last glimpse of May. The Mackail family all have a Sunday lunch with some rich friends, who suddenly suggest a visit to Whipnade, for the host is a Fellow of the Zoo. Very kind of them. The Mackails have no other engagement, and it is arranged that the host shall drive his wife and Diana and myself in his Rolls-Royce, while his chauffeur transports the children of both families in my Morris. It is perhaps irrelevant to the story that there was a fearful thunderstorm, and that we weren't the first visitors to find that, owing to the size of its paddocks and enclosures, Whipnade seemed to contain more flora than fauna. My point is that when the Morris was finally returned to me, I discovered that the chauffeur had driven it the whole way there and back—or in other words about sixty miles—with the choke-button full out. According to all experts and instruction-books this should have resulted in the oil becoming full of petrol, with consequent death and destruction to big-ends, gudgeon-pins, and everything else. I was aghast. I crawled back to the garage on the very little petrol that was left me, and gave instant orders—though this had been done only a few days ago—for the sump to be drained and refilled. And the Morris survived. In fact, it seemed none the worse. Moral? Well, thanks to the sturdiness of my engine, Æsop's earthenware pot hadn't exactly been cracked by the iron one. But it's still true that it's never cheap to go out with rich people; for even when they are apparently paying for everything, there's always a catch in the end.

My birthday again. Also my mother's; a fact which I haven't mentioned before, though it's certainly remarkable enough. I rang her up, and at her own suggestion took her to lunch in the refreshment-room at the South Kensington Museum, for which she had

always had an affection, though to my mind it lacked some of the qualities that make for real revelry. As usual, it was full of curators and students, with the customary sprinkling of Indians; and as usual, with the best will in the world, I was unable to alter its standard of catering. But we enjoyed ourselves, and laughed a good deal, and then—suddenly—there was Miss May Morris, or William Morris's daughter, who had known my mother all her life. She looked at me as if I oughtn't to be forty, which I had been since an hour before lunch; and I looked back at a dim memory of her father, and became plunged, I am afraid, in rather inattentive thought.

Something else came back to me. On my second birthday, so my mother had often told me, I had promised her never to grow any older. And though I couldn't remember giving this pledge, and some people might say that she had extracted it a little unfairly at the time, there could be no question that I had broken it now. For whether I had become a fool or a physician, and although I was neither fair nor fat, I was certainly forty. Was it possible, then, that I, sitting here beneath this bent-wood hat-rack, had once been the little boy who had been taken to stay at Kelmscott, and for whose birthday-parties, in those days, his grandfather had provided Punch-and-Judy shows in the garden of the Grange? I hated the whole business, suddenly. I wanted to go back to Young Street, where it was always summer and smelt of roses, and my birthdays were always the happiest day in the year. But I couldn't. I was trapped like everyone else. And though I stood Miss Morris a cup of coffee—so that my bill, with tip, came to no less than six shillings and sevenpence—there was no pride in my soul. Barriers everywhere. Help! I gulped, and took part in the conversation again. And presently, back to Church Street—where of course I had been happy, too—I fought these retreating memories, and managed to forget my age. I still don't know, though, that anyone should have birthdays after they are—well, shall we say ten?

On the following Saturday afternoon my children took part, for some reason, in a Masque on the banks of the Serpentine, and I was present, and it was bitterly cold, and Diana and I went on to dinner with the kind Dalziels. While on the Monday it looks as if I had had a particularly hard fight with the novel, for my only entry is "Bad day for work." But it was a good day for the children, for

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Diana took them along, after their school, to the Theatrical Garden Party, where she notes that she spent far too much, but that "they saw most of the people they wanted to." I wouldn't go with them, though I contributed to the expenses, for a bad day always meant that I must go on fighting at any rate until the waste-paper-basket was full.

And what else in June? Well, on a very cold Sunday we all embarked on a steamer at the Tower of London, and went to the Nore lightship and back. I regret to see that I have described this outing as exhausting and all-British, and if the second epithet was a trifle bitter, the first is confirmed by Diana. There weren't enough chairs on board, the life-boats—though necessary, no doubt—were so arranged as to hide most of the view, and the voyage lasted from a quarter to eleven in the morning until seven o'clock in the evening. Brhh! And what shameful, untidy glimpses of derelict factories and warehouses on both banks. Was this the gateway to the citadel of Empire? I'm afraid it was, though; and there was a slump on. And the slump would continue, with a few ups and many more downs, until such time as unemployment was abated by the same process that would start blowing those factories and warehouses to bits. Or, as one might say, Brhh! again.

The ominous empyrean gave a sign at the beginning of July. True that the Zeppelin which suddenly appeared over Chelsea was on a peaceful mission, and would never take part in a war. But this same week-end there was a further throbbing overhead, as aeroplanes flew towards Hendon for the Air Pageant, and again as they returned to their nests. We never attended this extraordinary display, to which vast crowds came swarming each summer for reasons best known to themselves. If they wanted to see accidents, these, at least, were mercifully and remarkably few. But if they wanted to see increasingly efficient rehearsals for their own destruction and the loss of their valued possessions, then this was certainly implicit in the whole affair. They queued up in their cars, they paid money, and they gazed at one murderous contraption after another with satisfaction and pride. They never attempted to burst the barriers and tear the things to pieces. They seemed quite contented with a future in which these machines, or others even more diabolically ruthless, were almost bound to be used. They even took their children to see the fun.



Why? I don't know. I didn't take my own children, though I quite see that one gets nowhere by being ashamed of the human race. And I was quite aware of the courage that was being exhibited, too. But I was under no illusion as to where it was all heading, or as to the ability of other countries to produce just the same sort of machines. I even realized that once the real thing started, it would have to go on and on; until cities were laid in waste and men, women, and children were buried beneath their ruins. For I hadn't forgotten the last war, and how as soon as it got going each nation was fighting not for its original object, if it had ever known this, but to avenge what some other combatant had just done. Fear was at the bottom of it all, I thought; yet even if people knew this—and they certainly didn't seem to know it at Hendon—they couldn't and wouldn't change. Why, in the name of horror and idiocy, had we got to go on having different nations at all?

Capitalism, said some. Nonsense. That's a trick word to shift the blame for anything you don't like on to other people's shoulders. And anyhow we're all capitalists from the moment we're born. And anyhow, again, Russia had frontiers and aeroplanes, too. I should say that obstinacy and stupidity were better words in this case; the silly, stubborn belief that killing isn't murder when your own Government orders it. The voice that says "Yes, but what would you do if you found a burglar assaulting your mother?"—as if Society were in the habit of tolerating this, too. The frame of mind which speaks of countries as "She," when in fact this mythical female consists of a bunch of middle-aged or elderly men who happen to have been hoisted into power, and naturally regard any criticism from below as treason. The frame of mind that would presently be so delighted to hear that its own bombs were bigger than ever, without detecting any implication that the same growth had taken place on the other side. The frame of mind that would react to danger and privation with extraordinary fortitude, yet still believe that a different vocabulary must put this widespread human quality out of reach. The frame of mind which comes, as I suggested before, from the inelastic structure of men's skulls, so that the spongy contents can invent a superb bit of mechanism, but can only employ it for blasting similar spongy contents into pulp.

All this I thought, with my own spongy contents, yet I was also

aware of the inelastic structure of my skull. Perhaps I was wrong then. Perhaps the inhabitants of North Carolina hadn't made a mistake in failing to lynch the Wright brothers at the end of 1903. Perhaps all that noise overhead would make war impossible, as some people said, or perhaps our rulers would remember how recently it had been tried, and what very little good it had done—to themselves or anyone else. I hoped so. And as an alternative form of consolation I recalled what Charles Dalziel had said the other night. I had spoken of my own fears, and in his cautious, deliberate, Scottish manner he had admitted that they weren't altogether unreasonable. "But," he had added, "I put my money on the 'anti' men. They always get the better of any new weapon in the end."

Did they? I knew he was much wiser than I am, and I clung to his encouraging tones. But even then it seemed a rotten sort of contest for first-class brains. And now, whatever the "anti" men are up to, they weren't in time to save Charles's lovely house. The gracious dining-room in which we sipped his brandy was demolished, together with the rest of his home and a large number of surrounding buildings, by one ghastly explosion only just eight years later. Thus proving what? I haven't the faintest notion. Nor, I should say, had the airman who did it, or the creatures who told him to go and do it, or poor Charles—though thank goodness he wasn't there—himself. The experiment wasn't even of scientific interest. It was just a damnably silly thing to do.

But this is still the phase of the Hendon Air Pageants, or, if it comes to that, of the Aldershot Tattoos. And though the Mackails didn't feel moved to join that other unimaginative crowd, either, they weren't so dashed superior that they didn't go to Wimbledon again—where Vines and Miss Wills were this year's victors—and Lord's—where Eton and Harrow drew. And we dined again with the Galsworthys at Hampstead, where again there were kindness and understanding, and a very good dinner, and the feeling that we were in the presence of a wise and tolerant saint. J. G. was still only sixty-four, still rode and played tennis, and looked no older than when I had first known him. There was no thought in my mind that this evening was a farewell party, as we drove down Fitzjohn's Avenue again, and back across the Park to Chelsea. No date had been fixed for the next meeting, but that there would be one I never

doubted, for both Galsworthys were always faithful to their friends. But I never saw him again.

July on the wane now. London getting dustier and stuffier. Plans once more for my August holiday, to begin as soon as the children started their own. Diana had been down to Splashcliff again and found another house, which was no more of a beauty than last year's. But this time it belonged to a friend, who was only asking twelve guineas a week, so I snapped at this—for five weeks—and we dodged the agent and the inventory-man as well. Also it was reported to be far less full of ornaments, and for the first and last time in our lives we should have a lawn-tennis-court of our own. So I bought a new bathing-suit. And we took little Dorothy out to dinner, and dined with her mother, and went to the school sports, and all kept appointments with the family dentist. There was a secret race going on in my study, too, as to whether I could finish the first draft of that novel before we all went away.

I won. I did it, in fact, with a couple of days to spare. I hadn't got the title yet. Or, rather, I'd got it, but at this stage still qualified it with a query. *Chelbury Abbey*. And there was quite a good plot, I thought, though ever since *The Flower Show* it seemed generally to be assumed by reviewers that I had managed without one. It was about an earl, and a big house that he couldn't afford to keep up, and a young American who fell in love with his daughter and tried to turn it into a kind of Country Club. I see now that I had also struck a bad patch in my literary style—I don't know how, or why I didn't notice it at the time, but far, far too many sentences begin with the word "And." It's true that the Evangelists did the same thing, but in my case it was certainly a fault, and that's partly why I'm not too proud of *Chelbury Abbey* to-day. Again, though I got a real American to check my American's share in the dialogue, and finally to pass it as correct, this didn't seem to satisfy other real Americans when the time came; so that—fond as I am of so many of them—I should learn, as an author, to leave them alone. Yet there wasn't much wrong with the bones of the book, as I laid it aside for polishing later on.

Meanwhile, on the last Friday in July the caretakers came into Church Street again, and we said good-bye to the bullfinches and the goldfish, and all went down by various routes to Splashcliff by the sea. A far finer summer than last year, with bathing nearly

every day. With more riding for Anne. With a visit to a circus—but it was getting more and more difficult for me to support this form of entertainment now, as it must, surely for anyone who starts to think. Clowns, yes. But animals, no, and not to be borne. I haven't, it is true quite reached the point where I picket any circus that appears in the neighbourhood—and as a matter of fact, they're not appearing just at present—but there's no doubt that I ought to, if I weren't so self-conscious, and lazy, and afraid of the police. For my principles have become absolutely rigid.

Two more visits, at the beginning and end of this holiday, to the Lewes races, which I think, on the whole, and so long as it's flat-racing, my principles might still just allow. I lost six shillings, after some heavy half-crown plunging, on the first occasion, and four shillings on the second; thus indicating, of course, that my back-ground, at any rate, wasn't as rich as it had been, if as yet hardly showing that I was personally on the brink of ruin. And an expedition, by car, to Bodiam Castle; the loveliest, perhaps, of all. Many afternoons and several evenings—one, of course, on her birthday—with Diana's relations at the house beyond Rooklington; so that again we were constantly passing that empty, top-heavy ex-vicarage, though I still generally averted my eyes. And the Milnes came over to see us. And the Hopwoods came over to see us. And on August 26th we were once more plunged into panic, for this time it was Topsy who got lost.

Only for half an hour, and we knew—as we called and shouted and rushed in all directions—that she *couldn't* be far away. But we didn't want half an hour like that again. What happened was that Diana and I were taking both dogs for a stroll, in one of the untidy patches with half-built houses on it that in those days were always such a feature of the Splashcliff scenery. No system there, ever. A good deal of civic conceit, as I should discover presently and more fully for myself, but no hint of civic pride. Let the town sprawl anyhow, so long as more ratepayers could be added to the roll. So it did, and it was sprawling round the back of our temporary tennis-court—though the builders had knocked off for the day—when quite suddenly Topsy just wasn't there.

Our hearts began thumping. We picked up Victoria, and I whistled and Diana called. And then we both began tearing to and fro, and penetrating into roofless buildings, and setting off separately

down various tracks and paths. No sign of her anywhere. Again, just as a year ago, that awful load of memories to complicate the strain of the search. And Topsy was five now, and had always been steady and sensible from the day when she had first come to us. Agony. One of us popped Victoria into the house again, and we both resumed the quest.

We didn't exactly find her. She just appeared again, almost exactly where we had seen her last, looking cool, calm, collected, and precisely as if, from her point of view, that hideous half-hour had been expunged from the record of time. Oh, what a relief! And still what a mystery, for unless the fairies had carried her off to play with them, I still can't imagine where she had been. Impossible to reproach her when she obviously had nothing on her conscience; so we just took her back, and loved her more than ever, and—apart from this new and painful memory—all was as it had been before. "Topsy," I said, "will you promise me never to do that again?" She blinked at me. She didn't answer. But thank goodness this was the last time that anything of the sort happened. We were always going to know exactly where she was now, for nearly seven more years.

On the first of September, which was also the date when *Ian and Felicity* was published, we all set off, after one of our very happiest holidays, for the last visit to Nonesuch. Diana and I, in fact, set off at half-past six in the morning; a plan of mine which she didn't much like, but with which I somehow persuaded her to fall in. My point was that even by 1932 the roads along the south coast would be choked with traffic later in the day, and that as I loved the early morning in any case, I didn't see why I shouldn't get what I wanted and avoid what I didn't. It is true that on some of these early starts I have been let down by mist. True, also, that big milk-lorries, at this time of day, rather tend to suppose that nothing else is about, and in consequence haven't always come round corners on the proper side of the road. But apart from these drawbacks—and they never led to disaster—there was more than one way in which I was cheating time.

For when the roads used to be empty, at the beginning of the century, they had terrible surfaces and the few cars on them were always breaking down. As cars and surfaces improved, the jams and blocks and cutting-in began. While to-day, though the roads are

much emptier again and still in pretty fair order, the cars are all wearing out and there isn't enough petrol. But on the first of September in 1932, at half-past six in the morning, I had the best of everything—a lively engine, a full tank, smooth roads to myself—and reached Nonesuch in time for a latish though lavish breakfast. I could see that I was thought a little eccentric to have arrived like this. But that couldn't be helped; and indeed there had been a freshness along the south coast which I could still taste, even though the last part of the journey had been overtaken by a waking world. And now?

Well, not exactly the Last Day in the Old Home; for it wasn't our own home, the tenants had had barely five years here, and the end was still a matter of weeks rather than days. But immense preparations were afoot for sorting, packing, moving, and storing. Diana, the good daughter always, was to stay and help with all this; and I, with a double reason this September for seeking solitude and sanctuary, got into my car again, after little more than a long weekend, and returned to Chelsea. This was my own farewell to Nonesuch, but Diana and the children and the dogs would be taking theirs, too, before long. No more bathing from the bottom of the lawn. No more glimpses of the *Majestic* or the *Aquitania* gliding past the trees. No more outings to Cowes and Southampton, or up the Beaulieu river. No more walks in the pine-woods. No more toads on the terrace for Topsy. Nothing, soon, but memories for all of us, as Nonesuch and all the aspects of its hospitality went spinning into the past.

So I looked back for the last time at that curve in the drive, and then it was the familiar route to London, and then I was in my study again—with an output of three short stories once more before the end of the month. At the beginning of the last week my family returned to me—though Diana had paid me two visits meanwhile—and the next thing, of course, would be the children's autumn term. It was just before this that Diana and I went down, on a Sunday, to lunch at a large house, about fifteen miles away, where I had stayed often enough in another part of the past. I had many friends at Balliol, and some of them, I am glad to know, are my friends to this very day. But there were two special ones, two who came much the nearest, two—each with the most enviable gifts of charm and character—who had paid me the very special compliment of seek-

ing me out, of penetrating my diffidence and shyness, and forcing me into the inmost part of their own lives. Not that I was reluctant, after the first moment of surprise. I was enormously flattered, and though they could have had love and admiration from anyone, they never lacked it from me. Both were killed in the first great war, taking something with them that I should never find again. And now, fifteen and a half years after the younger one's death, I was going back to his mother's house, which I hadn't seen since then.

It sounds, perhaps, as if I had neglected her; but she had never regarded me as more than her son's shadow, and perhaps she hadn't even wished to be reminded of that. I had seen her in London once or twice, I had looked for a sign that I was needed in any way; but she didn't give it, or I couldn't detect it, so that all I could do was to ask after her—for I knew her daughter, and sometimes met other members of the big family—or to send such messages as have been cheapened too often by the conventional use of words. Now, suddenly, one of these links had tightened or a particular message had got through, and there were Diana and I going up her drive again—where her son had first taught me how to change gear—and then we were in another house of memories, with something swelling inside me that I knew I could never express. It had hardly changed, though London was now almost at its gates: it looked the same, it smelt the same, and upstairs, I had no doubt, the various bedrooms that I had once occupied were just the same, too. I wasn't as much frightened of my hostess, perhaps, as I had once been; though at the worst, in the old days, I had occasionally been inspired to make her laugh. I kept my end up. I don't think I disgraced Diana. But indeed I was haunted by my own youth.

An even thinner figure, but with darker hair, accompanied me everywhere, and I was half ashamed of it—for how innocent and ignorant it had been—and half envious of all the qualities that I had lost. I suddenly remembered how they had changed my bedroom here one day without telling me; how, on returning from a trip to London, I had burst in on a girl—dead, too, now—in the middle of her preparations for dinner; and how, retreating rapidly, I had thought that I could never face her or anyone else in the house again. My embarrassment was such that I couldn't even apologize to her when eventually I did force myself down, and I blushed, from that moment onwards, whenever I crossed her path. Absurd now.

She had been almost fully dressed, and no one on earth could have skipped out more quickly or shown more horror at the time. But that was youth; and now I was forty, and going grey. Oh dear. And thank you so much for asking us. And a silent drive—but Diana knew and understood everything—past the lodge gates again, and back, over the newer, wider roads, to my real, authentic home. All to be turned, and churned, and digested, until little bits of it, perhaps, would presently come out on paper. For authors are like that, it seems. They feel so deeply, but they can't keep secrets from their pens.

And then Diana caught cold again—I dare say she had caught it already, but wouldn't tell me—and again started the autumn with something like a week in bed. So that she couldn't come to a play with which we had proposed to celebrate the children's return to school, and the fourth seat was occupied by little Dorothy instead. After which—October now—I had a week's cold myself. And then, as almost my first outing, came the last lunch at the big house further up the street.

For Diana's parents were leaving Chelsea, too, now; and she hadn't only found a new house for them, but again, subject to days in bed, was helping them with the move. I suppose she must have called on her mother practically every day during our own eight years in Church Street, and now she would have to go a great deal farther to continue this pleasant custom, and with no very convenient omnibus to help. But she would set off still, at least three or four times a week, and the Sunday lunches would be resumed for all of us as soon as the new house had settled down. For it was no hovel—indeed, though rather plain outside, there was plenty of space within, and it had an even larger garden than the house that had been given up. Moreover, I was considerably reassured as to my father-in-law's continued solvency by the fact that he was putting in an extremely expensive heating-system—which was indeed so hot that presently it cracked the wall of the house next door, and snow never lay for more than a moment on the pavement outside. But it wasn't in Chelsea. It was in Kensington, and not even in the old part of Kensington, and this, as you may already have gathered, was for me the real come-down. A personal matter, for the tenants didn't mind, and no doubt a ridiculous or even preposterous point of view.



Yet Chelsea was Chelsea. And that part of Kensington, however hot the water-pipes or vast and umbrageous the lawn, could never, for me, have the glamour of even a Chelsea slum. So I was sorry about it—much sorrier than I need have been—and told Diana that she should have kept her discovery to herself. Yet as she hadn't, and nothing could be done about it now, I also graciously allowed her to exhaust herself on the same kind of tasks that she had only just finished doing at Nonesuch.

Her reward, or one of her rewards, was a week-end, in which the children were included, at the Metropole at Brighton—where her parents were staying between the old house and the new. This meant—though I was down there for lunch on the Sunday—that I had both dogs on my bed for three nights; and though I didn't sleep very well—and perhaps they didn't, either, as I tossed them about with my legs—it was a test that my affection survived. It might also, since the Metropole at Brighton wasn't exactly the cheapest place on earth, be taken to indicate that some of my anxiety during the last seven months had been a trifle unnecessary or exaggerated. But of course I still didn't ask my father-in-law for his balance-sheet. Any more, to do him a little of the justice that he deserves, than he had ever asked for mine. Or at least than he had ever asked for it since the period when I had no assets whatever and wanted him to let me be engaged.

It was in this month, also—which ended with the author succumbing to his second great autumn cold—that the last of the children's Nannies departed, that the house-parlourmaid became a parlourmaid only, and that something between a housemaid and a useful character who would take on some of the Nannie's tasks joined the establishment. An effort was also made now to start calling the nursery the schoolroom, and presently this effort would succeed. In any case, Anne was getting on for eleven now, and a second child always tends to move forward a little faster than the first. For thirteen and a half years we had always had a Nannie on the premises, and for several of them there had been a nursery-maid as well. I had learnt a lot about both breeds, and so, by Jingo, had Diana; we had suffered from them, we had relied on them, and they had both lightened and added to the domestic load. There had been crises. There had been moments when they had nearly driven us mad, and others when

their unselfish devotion had caused me to abase myself—if preferably behind their backs. But the final Nannie was a peaceful, placid creature whom we all trusted and liked—the only Nannie, I had sometimes said, of whose presence it was possible to be unaware—and after all the years when I had groaned under tyrants or had clenched my fists in my study because of shouts and bumps on the stairs, at last a reign was ending to my very real regret. Moreover, it was a further sign of what those years had done. No more nursery or even schoolroom meals now. Dining-room tea henceforth for all of us. A daughter in her teens instead of a baby whom the first Nannie didn't altogether trust me to hold. Another reminder that I had entered the forties. Though still, except on a very occasional Friday or Saturday night, Diana and I were dining—apart from the bullfinches—by ourselves.

At the beginning of November I bought a new typewriter, or, to be more accurate, traded in the old one for a new model. I wonder how many I had got through by now—beginning with the big office machine that I obtained second-hand, and continuing with a succession of portables purchased every few years. And I wonder how many more I acquired, before my present instrument—which, though I have had it longer than any of them and though it is now held together in several places with paper-fasteners, is rapidly gaining the value of its weight in gold. All I know is that in 1932 I still didn't realize that the more typewriters I bought, the less income-tax I need pay. What a pity. But of course it was always exciting to see what fresh improvements had been made.

So I worked away on it, though a fountain-pen still did everything first; and still at short stories, though a fifteenth novel was beginning to loom through the fog. And the rest of the autumn ritual was resumed, with perhaps only two more memorable occasions during the remainder of this particular month. The first was when Diana discovered that a big department-store was doing a special line in large, cheap photographs of its customers, and asked if this included dogs. It did, apparently, or it did when it was she who put the question. So she took Topsy and Victoria along there, and they sat up side by side on a tapestry-covered stool, and the result was indeed as admirable as we could possibly have hoped. Each sitter seems completely unconscious of the other, and completely unconscious of herself. Topsy, the brunette, is benign, gracious, and gentle; but no



*Photo John Barker & Co., Ltd.*  
VICTORIA AND TOPSY, 1932



fool, either, as the first glance reveals. Victoria, the blonde, looks a little nervous and startled, I am afraid, as though she would be glad when this puzzling ordeal is over. But very soft, and very good-looking, and full of her own no less characteristic charm. When the portrait came home, we had it framed, of course, and stood it on a table in the drawing-room; and the more I looked at it—indeed, the more I look at it still—the harder it was and is to say which Peke had stolen the picture. At one moment one could swear it was Topsy. At the next the shy Victoria seemed to walk away with the whole thing. Again I look, and think, and remember, and still there is no answer to this quite unnecessary point. But Topsy was head dog, after all, while poor Victoria was only the second in command. And Topsy will always come first in Diana's heart. And Topsy—I must say this truthfully, also—will always, however secretly, be the first Pekingese in mine.

As for the other memorable occasion, I must admit that I had forgotten it entirely until I looked in our two books. But I can reconstruct it, more or less. We were invited to a large dinner and taken on to a large dance at a fashionable hotel. And this was very kind of our host and hostess, too; but in my own entry I have added "Too old and crazy for this!", and I fear it was also the truth. My life was so deeply centred on writing—whatever the permanent value or otherwise of what I wrote—that this sort of interruption, with late hours and a foretaste of their aftermath, had become something almost intolerable. I didn't fall asleep again, but always, from ten o'clock onwards, I was conscious of the time. The awful thing to-night was that Diana was enjoying herself, and that it would be entirely my own, selfish fault if she stopped enjoying herself. Oh, indeed I didn't forget what she had sacrificed so as to share her own life with an author of light fiction. I was virtually distraught on her behalf. Yet you will have observed the word "crazy," no doubt, and that, of course, was the trouble by now. If I stayed, I should scream. If I left, it would be cruel and rude. So I left, of course—though not without thanking everyone—and Diana left with me; and I suppose I had spoilt another of her evenings, and I wish I hadn't now. Indeed, if I could only put the clock back . . . But I can't. Nobody can. And nobody asks us out to dinners and dances any more.

December. More work. More social evenings of a milder and

earlier nature. And more preparations for yet another Christmas, to be spent—of course, now—at home. On the day itself Diana and Mary both had colds, and Mary finished it in bed. Diana's father was in bed with a cold, too, but we all lunched at the new house in Kensington—where there were still lucky charms in the plum-pudding—and Anne and I went on to tea at my own parents' house, which by pure chance and coincidence was only just round the corner. Then back to Chelsea, with more turkey for both dogs, and for Victoria—always with a strangely sophisticated palate—most of a mince-pie, too.

One more week, while the colds yielded to treatment, and then farewell, in the drawing-room at Church Street and with the accompaniment of the wireless, to 1932. Two novels published. Eighteen short stories written and accepted. Great changes in the family background, if not as great, it now seemed, as we had once had cause to fear. The bread-winner still earning enough for a family of four and a staff of three, but not, at such moments as this, completely convinced of his power to do so indefinitely. Mustn't stop trying, though. Mustn't forget that he had felt the same thing some hundreds if not thousands of times in the past. And there were the whistles and hooters again. The children, one of whom had sat up till midnight, while the other, at her own request, had been woken and brought down from her bed, were sent upstairs again. Out with the dogs. Off with the lights. Good-night.

## CHAPTER VII

1933

ALL new years start in the same way in my account-book, and even though 1933 began on a Sunday, I don't seem to have postponed the output of cheques. My Club subscriptions. The telephone. The doctor. The dentist. The garage. They all had their whack again, and who is to say which if any of them were extravagances now? Well, of course the Clubs were, and I was still rather ashamed of them. But then I still liked belonging to them, I was spending my own money that I had earned, and I wasn't actually depriving the rest of the family of either necessities or relaxations.

For instance, on January 2nd I took them all out to dinner and on to a musical play called *Wild Violets* at Drury Lane. And was rewarded; for with *Wild Violets*—so far as it is possible to do so in one's forty-first year—I feel instantly and passionately in love. For the first five minutes, at least, I was in some doubt as to whether we hadn't all made a mistake; but then everything was just what I wanted, for it was funny, sentimental, nostalgic, as well as an earful and an eyeful. When the girls' school, from which a couple were eloping in the last scene but one, began gliding away in the semi-darkness towards the back of the vast stage, this might have puzzled Shakespeare and annoyed Aristotle, but for me it produced a sudden tightening of the gullet and smarting of the eyes that I knew all too seldom at my present time of life. Illusion, by whatever expensive mechanical means it had been effected, was complete and overwhelming. If anyone had spoken to me at that moment, I should have first snapped their head off and then burst into tears.

Fortunately the entertainment was rounded off with a kind of epilogue—to balance the prologue which had raised those earlier doubts—so that I just had time to recover, and didn't entirely disgrace myself. But I had been happy, in this strange way. And on both of my subsequent visits to *Wild Violets* there was no loss of the original pangs and joy. This shows, of course, that I was a sentimental lowbrow, a charge which I can't deny. But I still don't see why one shouldn't like a play that runs for nearly three hundred performances at the largest theatre in London; even if I still can't explain why the entrance of the chorus on a fleet of bicycles should also have moved me to the very depths of my soul. It did, though. And if I'm going to be frank and shameless about it, I shall now confirm your worst suspicions of my taste. For when Diana and I attended a performance of *The Cherry Orchard* at the Old Vic, later in the same year, I came home and entered my opinion that it was an insolent piece of amateurish drivel. So that now, at any rate, you know what I'm like.

We also went to a pantomime two days later—but this time I was critical, too—and it was on the following day, or January 5th, that Anne's mouse Ernest (see an earlier passage) so very much disturbed our preconceived notions by giving birth to three hairless babies. Then I was left to consider this portent while Diana and the children went down, for four nights, to stay with her aunt near

Splashcliff. No doubt, therefore, that she passed that ex-vicarage again on quite a number of occasions. But if there were an idea at the back of her mind now, she still didn't tell me when she returned to London. Or perhaps it was still so vague and unformed that she hadn't yet recognized it herself.

Anne's eleventh birthday now, coinciding with Anstey Guthrie's party; but she was taken to the theatre again as well, with a bunch of friends, and had another party of her own next day. Then came the Milnes' bit of January generosity, with a juvenile banquet and a conducted visit to a second and much better pantomime. But this I only heard of, though in any case I was too old to be a guest, for in the middle of this month and more short stories I was the first to be knocked out by a new year cold. Bad enough to send me to bed again for two days, and to keep me indoors for the best part of a week. And this, alas, was why I could only send a telegram to little Dorothy when she made her first appearance on the professional stage.

Yet this was what was also happening on the night of the Milnes' festivities. I don't say that she was grown-up yet; though if it comes to that she can never be really grown-up in my eyes, any more than I found her lacking in poise and wisdom when I first came to know her as an enchanting child. But already she had been playing a part in a film, and now—suddenly and abruptly, and whatever her mother's mixture of pride and alarm—Miss Gladys Cooper had offered her an engagement at the Playhouse, and she had become a stage actress as well. So of course we sent her a telegram, as one does to members of the Profession, and of course it was our duty to rally round this production as soon as we could. Our intention, too; though I'm afraid we weren't quite as quick as all that. But there were reasons. And we hadn't forgotten. There would be no real blot on our record here.

The children back at school again, which unquestionably meant quieter morning sessions for the author, and Mary attending two sets of classes as well. Tap-dancing—but Anne was involved in this, too—on which, though as anything but a practitioner, I was rather keen; for I still feel that it should quicken the brain as well as the feet. And a Chelsea art-class, in a tumbledown studio round a couple of corners, from which she returned with large drawings of various models. Some talent here, I thought, though for hereditary reasons



I may have been expecting it, and certainly she enjoyed these afternoons. How much better, also, I felt, to begin one's instruction like this than to be set down—as my own little spark had once been—before plaster casts or an assortment of cones and cubes. Perhaps if I had ever been allowed real models, too . . . But then one can't do everything, and it was just possible that this Spartan training had ultimately helped me to write.

There was a new phase, however, in my own relaxation or education. Whipsnade had had nothing to do with it, for as I said, we had hardly seen any animals there at all. But suddenly I seem to have developed a passion for the London Zoo. Diana's father supplied us with green tickets, and almost every Sunday now I drove my family up to Regent's Park. I closed my eyes, or was still blinded, to the essential cruelty of the place. I noted, which was true enough, that it was much cleaner and more considerate in its treatment of the inmates than it had been when I had occasionally been taken there as a child. I appreciated—though this wasn't very zoological in the strictest sense—its extremely well-tended flower-beds. And soon, of course, I began imagining, as others do, that some of the inmates were getting to know me. I began tipping keepers, for the purpose of being taken, as it were, behind the scenes. I spent a good deal of money on the two automatic machines which threw fish to the sea-lions and some other form of sustenance to the creatures on the top of the Mappin Terraces. I became fascinated by the aquarium, which provided almost as good an atmosphere for the solving of knots in plots as that which I had once enjoyed at cinemas in the days of the silent screen. I spoke to the bearded addict who put on a suit of overalls so as to play with the wolves. And I closely studied, though I didn't attempt to emulate, the other regular *habitués* who stroked and fondled the lions. All this brought refreshment and interest on Sunday mornings, though already, perhaps, I mustn't examine my conscience too closely in the matter of wild animals behind bars.

On the last day of January—or on the day following Adolf Hitler's appointment as German Chancellor—there came the end of a tragic illness, nobly borne. Our friend, John Galsworthy, was dead. A letter must be written which could say so little; which indeed could only arouse a kind of disgust with my practised pen when it succeeded in saying anything at all. And nine days later we were there at the Memorial Service in Westminster Abbey, following a

ritual which seemed remote and inadequate—though what more or what else could have been done?—and I was still feeling desperately sad. It wasn't a matter of literature or of his place in it, whatever that place may ultimately be judged to be. A living spirit, on which—however long the intervals between our actual meetings—I had been gently leaning for years, had left that quiet, and gracious, and at the last that suffering frame. Loneliness was what I felt. The loss of a prop on which I might never, it is true, have put all my weight. But because I had always known that I could, and because it had gone now, the tight-rope must seem further than ever from the ground. I didn't weep, for men don't weep at memorial services at that time of life. I shouldn't, if it comes to that, care to say that I listened with complete attention to all the prayers and hymns. But my thoughts were faithful, and still are. For if there can be any intercession, after death, by one mortal man for another, I know whom I'm going to shout for when my own sins are judged. John Galsworthy. And whatever he is doing for all the other souls there, I know he won't let mine down.

Much illness, among the accounts and cancelled engagements, in February of this year. Diana down with influenza. Anne down with influenza. Mary away from school and her classes with an overpowering cold. The author still turning out short stories, though, when not visiting the sick or in attendance on his dogs. And one evening, snatched between set-backs, that must have been rather fun. A little dinner at Church Street for my cousin Di and her husband, and Mark Lubbock and his wife. Mark, so I gather from both parties, is only distantly related to Maurice—who saved my life and frightened me out of my wits after that memorable evening at Balliol—so it is mere chance that I happen to know them both. And Maurice deals with trade and finance; while Mark goes in for music. He was at Eton, I believe; once he was in the chorus of a musical comedy; but he has also studied his subject with fanatical industry, and having played, composed, and conducted in almost every possible capacity, was by this time—unless I have got my dates all wrong—attached to the B.B.C. Clever? I should say so. Mark is the kind of man who can't only read a score at sight, but can orchestrate in bed—where, as is well known, there is no chance of testing one's effects on the piano. He knows all the

classics, backwards, forwards, and sideways, but his frank and devoted interest is for light music, and this is where you are going to hear much more from him yet. Even if he weren't such a thundering good chap, I should still like and admire him for liking and admiring the same music as myself. But of course it means much more in his case, where he brings such skill and vast knowledge to it, and as I am devoted to his wife—even though she does prefer dachshunds to Pokes—we had a good, noisy, melodious evening with the help of my own piano. I may even have tried to sing. I shouldn't be at all surprised. Certainly I played duets with my cousin, though Mark, of course, was the hero and expert of the hour. Yes, great fun. For it didn't occur to any of us that the piano was going to be burnt then, and it was always most scrupulously tuned. *Ehett*, if I may say so, *fugaces* . . .

March. More Zoo. Great recrudescence of times with Plum Wodehouse, who was back again in his own house now. Third visit to *Wild Violets*. First and last visit—what a blackguard I had been, for this was also the last night of its short run—to little Dorothy's play. Of course we went round to see her afterwards, in one of those subterranean dressing-rooms beneath the stalls, and congratulated her with great honesty, for she had done pretty well. Then—just like her mother—she wanted to be told what she hadn't done so well. Then—just like me again—I had the nerve, though she was an ex-pupil of the R.A.D.A., to make a few suggestions. And then—once more like her mother (who dined with us on the next night)—she listened to me carefully, and I knew that if only this hadn't been the last performance she would at least have experimented with my hints. Was I a double blackguard, then, to have offered her anything but well-earned praise? No. Because there was no nonsense about her, we have never kept our friendship going on empty compliments, and she never minds what I say. Though you'll see, presently, that she could pay me a pretty big compliment when she chose.

There was lovely spring weather this March; and more and more, as I grew older, I needed this, and dreaded the winter months; but we still hadn't finished with illness in the Church Street household. Anne in bed, with another bad cold. Anne up again; but now it was Diana's turn. On Mary's fourteenth birthday she developed a

temperature of 103, and this was tonsillitis, with a doctor and nurse. And Mary had a cold herself now, so that only Anne and I saw the Boat Race from the Herberts' house on All Fools' Day. Again I found myself on the roof, and had to come tottering down. And again it was Cambridge that won.

Then Diana began recovering, so that there was a postponed birthday-party for Mary, after all. Yet the main memory on this date is of something else. In the morning Diana happened to look out of the drawing-room window, and suddenly noticed that a canary was sitting in our almond tree. It had escaped, obviously; but of course she didn't leave the discovery at that. There were cats about. The canary was probably hungry. So that the whole of that very fine afternoon, while Mary and her friends were at a cinema, Diana and I watched and waited—with a spare bird-cage handy—while the canary continued to cock its eye at the seed that we had sprinkled about. Later in the evening it started making flights, though it still seemed to regard the almond tree as its home. Then it made a longer flight, and disappeared. But meanwhile the news had spread, and the son of the house next door, who had now joined in the vigil, spotted it, looking rather exhausted, on a door-step in Mulberry Walk. Being a young man of great spirit and initiative, he instantly roped in a postman as assistant, and together they caught the canary in the postman's bag. Thus—for we were still well supplied with birds of our own, and inquiries in all directions had failed to reveal the canary's real residence—it passed into the possession of our neighbours, though again we provided the cage.

But that wasn't nearly all. Only a few weeks later, when Joey, as they had decided to call him, was settling down nicely, believe it or not, but a second canary flew in at one of their upper windows, and was captured with no difficulty at all. A girl, this time. They kept her, they called her Buttercup—for her plumage was a much richer yellow—and in due course she married Joey, and they brought up a fine family together. We never knew, of course, whether they were old friends, or even lovers, already; nor, if so, how on earth little Buttercup had also managed to escape and fly to the same house. It was a mystery, and perhaps you think I'm making it all up. But I'm not. This was the plain and preposterous truth.

For the children's Easter holidays this year—not mine, though, for my work went with me—we started with a week's visit to the Strick-

lands at Apperley, where of course we took the dogs. A train journey, for some reason, which Topsy distinctly preferred and Victoria, I am afraid, always hated. And more kindness when we all got there; including a conducted visit to some point-to-point races, which again made my conscience rather doubtful, though I liked the background, and used it presently for a story.

And then it was to be Splashcliff again, where we had taken yet another furnished house for the remaining fortnight. Rather a bad start that day, for the Stricklands' chauffeur chose to run things so fine at Gloucester station that the train had actually started as the last of our hand-baggage was hurled at us through the window. Phew! And at Church Street I quite unaccountably lost the fountain-pen that I had been using for years—nor did it ever reappear—so that now I must torment myself by supposing that it, rather than the hand that guided it, was the real cause of my literary luck. And then, though it was the nineteenth of April, on the way down to Splashcliff it suddenly began to snow. Another portent? It was all right, though. Splashcliff remained gusty and icy during the whole of our fortnight, but I covered a lot of ground on the new novel that I had now begun.

This was to be a kind of sequel, I had decided, to *Another Part of the Wood*, which had been published four years ago. For though I knew, and had had it proved, that sequels aren't always popular, I had as good as promised my readers that its eighteen-year-old heroine should be heard of again. I had thought her too young for marriage at the time, but a very suitable hero had obviously fallen in love with her, and now I, at any rate, wanted to know what had happened next. So with considerable nervousness I re-read her adventures, and though I knew how often their complexity had nearly beaten me, and all the places where I had run up blind alleys and been forced to turn back, I was pleased and surprised now to find myself smiling and even chuckling more than once. It was luck again, no doubt, that the bits and fragments had fallen into what I now saw was quite a sound piece of construction, and I had no sort of guarantee that if I went on with the story the same kind of luck would hold. But it was interesting to be with so many old friends again, and what, I mused, about setting them all down in a furnished country house?

I liked the idea, and began planning for it and much else. Already,

in fact, this sequel was to be called "Summer's Lease"; as it would have been, if I hadn't later discovered that the title had been used by a rival. Yet meanwhile it had more than the outline of a real plot, and whatever obstacles were still lurking, I was quite clear about the rounding-off process at the end. Wedding-bells, of course, this time, and why not? For she was a nice girl, however innocent and foolish, and at any moment that I needed further inspiration I had only to look at Ernest Shepard's picture of her. Though I didn't go quite as far as taking it to Apperley or Splashcliff.

Yes, very cold and windy; but there were friends and relations in the neighbourhood, and Anne did some riding again, while Mary started lessons—though I am afraid they never came to very much—at golf. And on April 22nd—when personally I have merely noted that I bought a penny newspaper and was badgered by an old Gipsy into a gift of sixpence—the clever, far-seeing Diana went off by herself to look over the old vicarage at Rooklington.

It was empty. It was still ugly; indeed it was even uglier, perhaps, inside than out, with that multi-coloured tessellation on the hall floor and the chocolate paint or varnished pitch-pine of its doors, windows, and stairs. Its garden had been let go, as they say, and would need a lot of pulling back. But there were two fig-trees. And the views from its tall windows were still exquisite in all four directions, and water and electricity were laid on. Three sitting-rooms—two of considerable size. Five bedrooms on the first floor. Three up in the ill-proportioned roof. A bathroom, with a very rusty bath in it. The usual offices, as they also say, and even—as far as the first half-landing—a secondary flight of stairs. An old stable that could be used as a garage. About an acre of garden, altogether; much of it walled, and planted with ancient fruit-trees. And about two acres of L-shaped field.

How on earth any vicar in a parish with so minute a population had ever been able to build and occupy a house of this size, is something that I still can't understand. But he'd done it. Its Gothic front porch still struck an ecclesiastical note, and, besides, it was the present vicar with whom Diana was now in treaty.

She took me over to see it, too, and I nearly fainted.

"Not only," I pointed out, "is this the ugliest house that I've ever seen, not only does it need doing up all over from top to toe, not only does it need furnishing, and not only are nine-tenths of the

garden in an appalling state, but we've got a house in London already, we don't need another one, still less do we need a two-acre field, and, anyhow, I can't afford it."

To which Diana replied, *seriatim*, as follows: That the house wouldn't be nearly so ugly if she were given a free hand with it. That doing up houses was rather fun. That she was sure her father and mother would let her have some of the Nonesuch furniture, which was just eating its head off in store. That the garden was her affair and not mine. That although we had a house in London, the children couldn't stay there all the year round, and it was cheaper to buy a country house than to go on paying twelve or fifteen guineas a week and breaking other people's ornaments. That the field would be just the place for the Nonesuch donkeys, for whom her father was now renting accommodation in this neighbourhood. And that it didn't matter in the least whether I could afford it or not, because she was going to buy it herself.

"You can't," I said.

And I believed this. For though she had acquired some capital since the days in Walpole Street, capital, to my mind, was something entirely dedicated to rainy days and the children's future. While so far as income went, I knew well enough that her salary from me was perpetually being borrowed in advance. Yet it was also true that though I kept accounts and always paid bills on the day they came in, Diana was the one with a real grasp of finance. Her arithmetic might be poor and her generosity something of a scandal, but she was never haunted, as I was, by the elementary or child's-money-box attitude towards pennies and pounds. I was a slave to Mammon, but she was free. I should never have been the least surprised, though, if she had suddenly told me what the Gold Standard was.

So there was an argument about the house at Rooklington, and I can't remember that I ever either changed my mind or gave way. But I know that Diana offered the vicar, as representing the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, a smaller sum than he had asked. That a little later the third party, who always crops up on these occasions and had nearly done us out of Church Street, offered him a little more. And that while I was still wondering if I were relieved or disappointed, the vicar displayed his Christian principles by rejecting temptation and closing with Diana at his own, original price. Two

thousand pounds for the freehold. At least another five hundred to put the fabric and decorations into order. Could I possibly stand by and let my wife find all this money, when by a mere stroke of the pen—and a perfectly frightful wrench—I could sell out some capital myself?

As I still hesitated, and not altogether from meanness, for it was still my conviction that one permanent residence was quite enough, a familiar god appeared from a well-known machine. The donkeys may have influenced him. Or again, and naturally, there was a great similarity between him and Diana in their view of how money should be treated and what constituted a bargain. But in any case her father suddenly announced that one of his life-insurance policies had matured and was being paid off, and with this sum, he said, he was going to give her the house.

This still meant that someone would have to pay the builder—it was Diana, in fact, who did nearly all that; and that someone—myself in this case—must assume responsibility for rates, taxes, lighting, heating, water-supply, telephone, running repairs, and all the other regular overhead that I was already paying in Chelsea. I could see, too, that whether this came to more than I had been spending on furnished houses or not, it was something that once started would have to go on. But this moderately clear vision was now, as one might say, the only leg that I had left to stand on. I couldn't conceivably come between my wife and her father. And when I mentioned this vision, Diana had an answer for that, too. "We can let it," she said. "One can always let houses in this part of Sussex, at any rate in the summer, and you'll see it'll be the best investment we've got."

At this second glimpse that was laid before me, I immediately and violently recoiled. "What?" I said. "Have some awful family—with dogs and children, probably—knocking all our paint about and breaking our furniture and tearing all my books? Impossible!" But she only smiled kindly, as I ranted on like this. For already, you see, at the threat of anyone else being allowed on the premises, a vast sense of vicarious possession had risen up and nearly choked me. A husband who flew into this kind of passion had clearly passed the point where he had accepted an accomplished fact. And I had, of course—though I had been powerless from the beginning; and henceforth, however astonishing or fantastic or unjustifiable it might



be, I was forced to regard myself as a Londoner with a country house.

Yes, it was alarming, but it had all been fixed. Green paint was to cover the chocolate and pitch-pine. Distemper and varnish—an admirable cheap substitute for paint, where a builder isn't too proud or stubborn to use them—were to cover some of the walls, and new papers were to go on the others. The existing bathroom would have a new bath, and a new bathroom would be made in the smallest of the five bedrooms on the first floor. The kitchen would be turned into a maids' sitting-room, and the scullery into a kitchen. The hideous little conservatory with its galvanized-iron roof would be reconstructed as a place for sitting out. The outer walls would be whitewashed. The garage—fancy me with a garage of my own!—would be swept and garnished, and fitted, at my own reckless request now, with electric light. Carpets, curtains, matting, and linoleum would be bought. Furniture would be accumulated by purchase, by removal from Church Street, and—as Diana had correctly foretold—by gifts and loans from her parents' still redundant store. And an obliging if profoundly inexperienced local inhabitant would be engaged, with a supply of new tools and implements, to start reclaiming the wilder parts of the garden.

All this would take time, of course, as well as money, though Diana was determined to be in by the end of July; and during the next three months—for we returned to Church Street by the beginning of May—she was constantly slipping down by train (a steam-train still in those days) to examine progress, to make fresh arrangements, and to urge the Splashcliff builder to put on more speed. I'm afraid I never went with her; partly because of my sacred work, and partly, no doubt, because I was a selfish, ungrateful brute. But I made suggestions from a safe distance, and they weren't all necessarily unhelpful. And I continued—such being my abominable nature—to think of fresh drawbacks and flaws. Particularly I would inquire about the big notice-boards on the main road, which announced that the whole of the Rooklington Estate was for sale, and with more than a hint that it was Ripe for Development. "Have they started any bungalows yet?" I would ask.

But they hadn't. And as the boards, to my knowledge, had been up there for years now, perhaps they wouldn't. The belief was that the farmer, who owned it all, had refused to sell piecemeal and was holding out for his own price. Good luck to him, then, and long

might the buyers be thus kept at bay. I thought of the lovely skyline of Rookery Hill, above the elm-trees, broken only by the faint irregularity of some ancient barrows; and it certainly didn't occur to me that within seven more years—after all those centuries—it would be carved up for trenches and gun-pits. I thought of all the other peaceful and gently undulating views, and of the glimpse from our upper windows—past nothing but the church and a few humble cottages—to the blue line of the sea. An incredible survival on this part of the coast, so that the very slightest ability to face facts should have warned me how long it was likely to last. But my wife was a freeholder now, or would be as soon as her solicitors stopped gazing at the agreement, and though I might not admit it yet, I had a stake in the country, too. Astonishing how keen this suddenly made me to defend little Rooklington from all assaults of its enemies; for until this moment I had never done more than sigh or look the other way when the fair face of England was defiled. But from our ugly house I intended to keep a close eye on anyone the least like a speculative builder now. And this much was also true. That once I was inside it I should be one of the few people who could no longer see what a blot it was.

Meanwhile I worked, and Diana went to and fro, and started her hay-fever again. While I also committed a further extravagance myself. If four people were going to the Zoo every Sunday, nobody's green tickets would last much longer. But as I was still in this weekly zoological mood, I took steps to be proposed for election as a Fellow. If this went through—and as no qualifications were required, I imagined it would—I should be involved in an immediate expenditure of eight pounds, with a subsequent subscription of three pounds a year. But I should also stop being a nuisance to other Fellows. I should be privileged to sit on a special lawn, and I could lunch in a special restaurant, too. All this was irresistible; and henceforth—until growing humanity or eccentricity caused me to resign again—I could, if I had chosen, have made constant use of the suffix "F.Z.S." In other words, I had joined, as one might say, a fifth Club; and a very good Club, in some ways, it was. That lawn was its only smoking-room, and there were no free illustrated papers to read. Nor was there a Porter. Nor could I write my letters there, or drop in for a quiet snooze. Yet apart from the feeling of superiority that

it gave me—the capitalization of which was what kept the whole organization solvent—one also got an astonishingly good lunch. So we took to lunching there on Sundays quite a lot now—a day when our absence from home was always popular in the basement—and many a good tuck-in we all had. Later we would sit proudly on the lawn, looking rather like animals in an enclosure too, perhaps, while the gibbons shrieked in the offing, and the common herd went shuffling slowly by. Presently, if we remained there, a band would play. Altogether, in fact, the zoological aspect became less accentuated, and indeed, as I look back on those days now, I see that it was the lunch and the lawn that we most enjoyed. Though I still sought sanctuary sometimes, and sorted out my literary thoughts, in the calm and darkness of the Aquarium.

On May 25th—the Wodehouses to dinner in the evening—my second mammoth volume of short stories was published. It was called *Having Fun*—which was also the title of the last or thirtieth item—it had a foreword, a dedication to Topsy and Victoria, a portrait of me and Topsy on the jacket, and all this—six hundred and twenty-four pages of print—could be bought for three half-crowns. Something of a bargain. Indeed, you could almost sell it for three half-crowns now to a waste-paper merchant, and still have some very harmless memories left. But though it's unobtainable now, so that I take it the first edition was disposed of somehow, neither I nor the publishers expected much more than this. Meanwhile, there were some kind notices and some nice letters for the author, while once or twice he dipped into the volume himself and smiled. For take it all round, and forgetting, as he did at such moments, all the agony of creation and the innumerable sheets that had been torn up, there could be no doubt that he, too—sitting there and writing these ingenuous fables—had had a good deal of quiet Fun.

June 3rd. I'm forty-one now; and that's all right, because it's obviously the same as forty. No banquet or beano, but a nice, quiet Saturday afternoon in our own house and garden—very fine weather now—and two chance visitors to turn it into a little occasion, after all. The tiny fountain splashed, as the two goldfish circled endlessly beneath it, and we put cushions on the brink and sat there. I was happy, I think, for I always like a Saturday afternoon, anyhow. It's only on Sundays that the primal course starts getting under my

skin again, for even though I'm longing to be back in my study, I still haven't forgotten what Mondays meant at school.

More Zoo. More Rooklington trips for Diana—but the agreement was signed now, so that we were justified in having made the builder start. A centenary exhibition of my grandfather's pictures at the Tate Gallery, which we both visited, and not merely from loyalty, again and again. Then back to the present, with all the familiar tokens of a London June. The dogs on Wimbledon Common. Their owners at the Wimbledon tennis ground. The children at the Theatrical Garden Party. The children on the stage themselves, at one of their dancing-class matinées. Their parents, realizing that the best time of the year is again going faster than ever, endeavouring to cement their friendships with a couple of home-made cocktail-parties. And little Dorothy dining with us, of course.

July. Further outbreak—in the midst of more Wimbledon and the annual visit (though still in my original wedding-suit) to the Eton and Harrow match—of evenings with Plum; who must recently have been putting on his own best clothes for Leonora's wedding to Peter Cazalet. The Zoo came into our companionship, too. Not that he accompanied me on the night when we dined there, and the gardens were illuminated, and at last I regained something that I had lost with the extinction of the White City and Earl's Court. But a couple of evenings later I was telling him about it, and suddenly he must at least see that private lawn for himself. So we finished our smokes there, just before closing-time, and now it seemed that his one wish was to become a Fellow, too. Was I too new to propose him? I risked it, found a seconder, and he was naturally elected at once. Then came the Plummishness. He couldn't tell me that he had changed his mind, that he could do anything on impulse, but nothing—except his own ceaseless work and those almost equally ceaseless expeditions to Dulwich—in any way that could even appear to tie him down. So he didn't acknowledge the Zoological Society's intimation of the glory that had come to him, he didn't send them a cheque, and presently, I suppose, they grew tired of writing to him and left him in solitary peace. A lesson that I didn't really need, and shouldn't have risked receiving. I ought to have remembered how he vanished on our walks. But we were still friends, for all that.

Last lap of the new novel. Again a race—though I kept my head and didn't hustle—to finish a first draft before my holiday. Considerable disturbance in the background, as Diana's days at Rooklington came closer and closer together, and as the imminence of this new and strange adventure kept breaking in on my thoughts. But though it had turned into a long book—a hundred pages longer than *Another Part of the Wood*—I stuck to my guns, and just finished it in time. I reeled. I wanted to sink back and do absolutely nothing. But already some of the Church Street furniture had been labelled for removal, and now Diana and I—and the dogs, of course—must go off and be ready for it at the other end.

On our arrival we discovered, of course, that the house was still full of workmen, though it had been clearly understood that the last should have gone. But Diana had done her own part of the job extraordinarily well. The rooms remained loftier than one somehow expects in the country, but they were all the right colour now. The new baths and the new bathroom were a vision. While the effect of whitewashing the outside of the premises, coupled with all the greenery that had appeared since Easter in our belt of sycamores, notably modified that air of top-heaviness. No, it still wasn't a beauty, but it was ours now in more than the sense of formal ownership, and we were both grateful and both thrilled.

For the first two nights we quartered ourselves separately on Diana's two aunts, spending the day-time in battle with painters, upholsterers, and removal-men. Then, for we couldn't put them off, the children arrived—the bullfinches were to be driven down by a kind friend on the next day—and thus on the night of Friday, July 28th, 1933, exhausted but triumphant, we all retired to rest for the first time beneath the roof of our still nameless country house.

Or had this problem already and also been solved? At any rate it took some solving, for when the house was last occupied, it had been called the Vicarage. But there was another and authentic vicarage now, and if we called it the Old Vicarage—which was the first and most obvious notion—not only might this lead to confusion, and not only, as I felt, would it accentuate the fact that it was really neither old nor young, but I was also convinced that we should all quickly degenerate into calling it the Old Vic. So I put my foot down. And Diana said: "Well, think of a better name if you can."

To this challenge—probably with my hands full of nails, screw-

drivers, coils of picture-wire, and other implements of a man in the middle of a move—I gave my concentrated attention, and presently announced my reply. "Rooklington House," I said; and proceeded to explain that this was clear, straightforward, and unpretentious, while it would also have the advantage of considerably shortening our postal and telegraphic address. Diana seemed to think that it was a bit too self-important, and so, it appeared, did some of our friends later on. But she couldn't improve on it. She quite saw its merits. And she didn't care for "The Old Vicarage" any more than I did.

So this was settled, for at least there were no rival claimants to the name, and we began ordering note-paper and postcards. And we told the telephone authorities and the Rural District Council—as it then was—who took the news quite calmly. So that Rooklington House it became and remained; and still is, presumably, though about ten months after we were compelled to leave it, it was more or less wrecked by bombs. Rooklington House, near Splash-cliff, Sussex. But though it was our house now, it still wasn't mine, and through all the seven years that we had it some inhibition restrained me from supplying it to *Who's Who*, or any other such publication, as my address. Diana wouldn't have minded. If I lived in her house in the country, she lived in mine in London; and but for her, in fact, it couldn't have been all mine. So perhaps the inhibition was an aspect of self-consciousness, after all. Well, it's true enough that I never felt we *ought* to have two houses.

But this doesn't mean that I just stood by as a mere incubus or guest. Not at all. My holiday had started now, and I laboured as hard as anyone to improve and ameliorate the property. I hammered and screwed. I climbed ladders. I kept rushing into Splash-cliff or other neighbouring towns to buy presents for the new house, and within a week of our arrival I had given it a new radio set, with gramophone attachment, and an extension loud-speaker in the maids' sitting-room. I bought books for it, and new garden tools. I pointed out a method by which a small wooden gate, in place of a wire archway covered with Dorothy Perkins, would turn half the garden into a safe playground for the dogs; and then attended to the execution of this plan as well.

Every day now the place was getting tidier and more like a home. The multi-coloured tessellated hall-floor was covered with linoleum

in large black and white squares. The flower-bed on the gravel sweep outside the front door—which had been all right, no doubt, for a pony-trap, but round which no car could get without reversing two or three times—was carted away, and a fresh load of pebbles from the beach was strewn over the whole drive. Soon enough, also, we should be planting trees, shrubs, bulbs, and flowers for ourselves. And we should be buying an Aga Cooker, on the hire-purchase system, and putting in more bookshelves, and adding a fixed wash-basin to one of the attic bedrooms, and spending more money on our ugly but much-loved house in every possible way. I ordered a ping-pong table—which we gave to the troops when we left. And some garden seats. And Diana bought a bird-bath.

Yet my actual holiday must have been a short one; for whether it were that I was impatient to test my new writing-table or that I was aware of the necessity of earning as well as spending, I had turned out two more stories by the end of the month. And by September, of course, I was in full blast again. But I bathed, too, and went on expeditions, and even played one of my rare rounds of golf. And the Milnes came over, from their own country house, to see what ours was like. And the Darlingtons, who were holidaying in Splashcliff, came over more than once. While Diana's parents were in Brighton again, so that there was a good deal of coming and going from both ends. It is possible—indeed, I might almost call it probable—that Brighton had been selected so that her father could keep in touch with his donkeys; who were still in that field on the outskirts of Splashcliff, though they were to join us as paying guests as soon as we had provided a water-trough and a shelter. A gale, by the way, in the following winter blew this shelter—a pretty solid affair—right over the garden wall; but, of course, it was replaced at once, the donkeys were none the worse, and Diana would continue to feed them and pet them as long as the Fates allowed.

It was in this August, also, that she started having driving-lessons; the point being that if I insisted on working in the mornings, she might still be able to do her shopping in the little town. I was doubtful about this. Though she had sat beside me for nine years and in five different cars, I still suspected her road-sense. Moreover, she had always had a remarkable antipathy to anything under the bonnet, and whenever my engines made queer noises she would always say she couldn't hear them—with the hope, apparently,

that I wouldn't stop and get out. It's quite true, of course, that plenty of women have driven millions of miles without the faintest notion of what is actually propelling them. But it's also true—poor Diana!—that the local garage produced a car for these lessons which it was virtually impossible to drive at all. It was stiff, clumsy, cumbrous, and constantly breaking down. In fact, there were two of it—both equally unmanageable—and they didn't even seem to have the same sort of gears. Very unfair; though the pupil quite agreed with me that she mustn't take the Morris out until she had mastered a few elements. Besides, the Morris was feeling its age now, and I was having a good deal of trouble with it myself. So presently she took to postponing her appointments with the instructor, and a little later they lapsed altogether. We were back where we were. Her shopping and my work must adjust themselves as well as they could now. And though I think she renewed her licence once—there were no official driving-tests in those days—neither of us said anything about it when the third year came round. I was still the family chauffeur, and it was my own fault if there were no cream for lunch. I didn't complain, though. For I knew I should never have had one easy moment if she had ever gone out motoring by herself.

Let's turn to another subject. Birds, again. Janey, who had been with us more than eighteen months now, was still a problem, though she still had every possible attention, and a vast cage—both here and in London—to herself. But she was never gay. She was never friendly. And though Bully sang to her, she still made faces at him. Besides, he had sung just as loudly and cheerfully when we had had him by himself. In this very fine August we put both their cages out in the garden sometimes, though on separate tables, and never, of course, when we weren't there to watch for a village cat. And Bully sang; but Janey sulked. So that early one morning Diana opened the door of her cage, and sprinkled seed all round it—so as to encourage her if she flew out and then wished to return. But she did fly out, and she never did return. The cage remained there for forty-eight hours, to give her every possible chance; but we never saw her again. Some people say that caged birds who escape are instantly attacked by the wild ones, while others say that this is quite untrue. The weather was warm and balmy. There were trees all round. There was food and water in the garden. And still



Bully chirruped and sang. But poor little Janey— Well, what else were we to do, or what else would you have done yourself, with a bird whose life was a burden to it, and a garden so full of summer delights? Of course we felt sad, and of course we felt guilty. But I still think that Diana did the right thing, or atoned as far as she could for the original mistake. And Bully didn't care twopence. He liked us, and we adored him. If he were a widower now, it didn't seem to worry him. Though more than ever, perhaps, and immediately after the dogs, he was our very special pet.

Here comes the Rooklington Produce Show again, with big vegetables in the little school-house, with innocent sports on the rough grass by the church, with a few very local and home-made games of skill—including a coconut-shy under the direction of our part-time gardener—and some remarkably discordant music from the British Legion Band. But there was no temptation to mock at it this year; for not only had I contributed to the expenses—I was a little disappointed, though, that nobody offered me a rosette—but I was a resident now, with a violent and growing pride in my own village. So I gazed at the vegetables and other exhibits, and took tickets in raffles, and engaged—equally unsuccessfully—in some of the games of skill. And though it wasn't the least like the Flower Show in my novel of that name, I wandered about in a great state of happiness for several hours on end.

I was a bit stupid—I always am, I fear—at recognizing some of the people who already seemed to know me so well. But the children helped me. And Diana helped me. And I don't think I really gave any notable offence. I knew Diana's relations, of course, for that was easy. I knew the vicar. I knew the farmer and his wife—though I still didn't like to mention notice-boards. And now, or just about now, I had also become capable of recognizing some other neighbours, who were going to become our friends. The Hughes family; with George, or the father, as it were for me; with Peggy, his wife, for Diana; and with Jane and Graham for Mary and Anne. We were going to start a bit slowly—as perhaps one should when there is time—but it was going to be a very sound and solid affair. George Hughes was assistant clerk to a City livery company, so that they were all Londoners too. Here, at Rooklington, they had a little house near the church and the big barns; but they were already thinking of building another one. Well, I trusted them

not to make it a Tudor bungalow. Besides, they'd still got to get round the farmer, and his principle of selling all the land or none.

Suddenly I dropped the short stories—though I was back soon enough—and wrote an article or essay instead. Something had reminded me that September 25th would be the twentieth anniversary of the death of H. G. Pélissier, and during the brief years of his glorious prime I must have seen the Follies—generally from the pit—almost as often as I had been to *Peter Pan*. I knew the words and music of both entertainments by heart, though the Follies, of course, were always changing theirs; and if I admit now that my grand total of both attendances was something well over a hundred and fifty, I still don't see that this is evidence of a mis-spent youth. One ought to go mad over plays and performers when one is young. And there were half-crown pits then. And of course I always saved the programmes so as to use them—though this was hardly necessary—again and again. Now, therefore, my mind leapt back; I wrote my tribute to this very great satirist, and musician, and clown; and I offered it to *The Times*. I had a slight pull here, no doubt, for Robin Barrington-Ward, its assistant editor then, had been another of my greatest friends ever since Balliol, and he and his wife should certainly have been mentioned long before now. On the other hand he is quite incorruptible and I have never tried to corrupt him, so that I could still feel, when my article was accepted, that the subject or its treatment was the real cause. Rather fun, though, to bob up in such very respectable company, and to see *The Times* paying homage to a pierrot. I got a lot of letters from old fanatics; for there has never been anything quite like the Follies, and there never can nor will be again.

"Rain at last," says Diana's record, on September 12th, which shows you the kind of seaside summer that we'd had. The downs had shimmered. The sea had sparkled. There had been roasting afternoons on our parched and always remarkably weedy lawn—for with fields all round us there was no chance of keeping plantains or even thistles at bay—but always it was fresh in the evenings, however hot the day. The dogs, who still hated the beach and were consequently never taken there, knew all the new walks now and all the Rooklington smells. I can see them still. Topsy trotting steadily forward, and Victoria—for some reason best known to her-

self—suddenly turning and charging her friend in the flank. A little rough? A little disrespectful? Undoubtedly; but Topsy only blinked, and picked herself up again, and trotted along as before.

But the harvest had been gathered now, the Michaelmas daisies were beginning to come into flower, and all too soon the children must go back to their school. So on the last Monday they, and the staff, returned to Church Street, and on the next afternoon Diana and I, and the dogs, and Bully in his little travelling-cage, all followed them by road. Autumn again, or something very like it, in London. And the new term celebrated by my taking both children to the fireworks at the Crystal Palace. I'm glad I did this once, though I'd been meaning to do it for years and was quite under the impression that I was going to do it again. For it was indeed a moving spectacle—though a bit noisy sometimes—as we sat in a kind of open veranda looking over the terraces, and as the night was made brilliant and vivid by that extravagant display. The huge building was eerie and romantic as we passed through it again on our way out, though I still seemed to detect that curious aroma of gravy. But this was the last time that I saw it in its might and majesty; except, which was often enough, from the windows of a train.

Lunch at the Zoo again. Diana in bed with a cold. The author conscious, as she rose once more, of an ominous sensation in his throat. But we had planned to experiment with a week-end at Rooklington, where Diana always had work in the garden, and perhaps if I took no notice and had a change of air, it would only be a false alarm. It wasn't, though. I retired to my Rooklington bed with an absolute snorter. I learnt, in the midst of my sufferings, that the children had gone to bed, too. And the week-end turned into another ten days' holiday—except for poor Diana—before we were well enough to return. It wasn't this, however, that made subsequent week-ends rather few and far between. The fact was that we just weren't week-enders. Often enough it seemed shocking that a country house should be standing waiting for us only sixty-two miles away. But I couldn't work if I were always on the move, the children mustn't miss their Monday mornings at school—I don't know why not, now I come to think of it, but perhaps there is something to be said for rules—while for Diana even

this sort of visit must always involve an immense amount of organization at both ends. So Rooklington stood there, getting colder and colder—as we should discover at Christmas—and perhaps it was criminal to have two houses and only use one of them; yet the step had been taken, and there were no real regrets. Diana, I was glad to notice, hadn't mentioned letting it lately; though anyhow who wanted it in the autumn or winter? The whole thing worried me a good deal sometimes, for both conscience and expenditure were concerned. But then think what a happy two months we'd had there. Think how we had got the freehold for nothing. And it wasn't, after all, even with this double overhead, as if I weren't still paying my way.

Another dinner with the Wodehouses—to be returned, with the addition of the Milnes, before the end of the month—and then (which just shows what I'm like when I talk of money) a burst of extravagance again. I could justify it, in a sense; for if we had a country house, then, of course, in 1933, we needed a car, and the Morris's clutch had burnt out completely at the beginning of September. On the other hand I had had it repaired, and could undoubtedly have carried on with it for several more years. But I wasn't going to. Another impulse seized me, and Diana and I went off to the Motor Show at Olympia—accompanied by the sales-manager from my garage, who at least got us in without paying—and again we were clambering in and out of glittering models on stand after stand.

Diana thought of nothing but the general appearance of a vehicle and the softness and angle of the seats. But I, of course—though my long legs immediately put several models out of court at once—had other demands as well. I sought the maximum of reliability and the minimum of attention—for I still did most of this myself—and though I was a genuine purchaser this year, I'm afraid I gave a good deal of trouble with some of my penetrating inquiries. Several battles of wits took place, as the demonstrators tried to show how easy it was to grease some quite unapproachable point. But all the time, though Diana was now getting a little impatient, I was narrowing my investigations down. Two cars appeared to be running neck and neck for my favours, and one was cheaper, but the other was certainly easier on the eye. Already, of course, owing to the ingenuity of the industry, my poor old Morris seemed almost as obsolete as

a sedan-chair. But which—just a moment while I get into this one again—was its successor to be?

The sales-manager, controlling his own impatience and fighting another constant battle with rival sales-managers, suggested that I should have a trial run in both. All right. I would. Diana's momentary troubles were over, and we left the arena, laden with literature which I studied again and again. Also we had the two trial runs, and how great was my shameful relief when I found that the cheaper car was much the less active and silent on the road. So I spurned it, and ordered the other one. A Rover Fourteen, 1934 model, which still hadn't got a luggage container at the back, but in all other respects seemed well ahead of everything else, in that class, at the Show. It was to be black—for the odd thing is that a black car needs far less washing than any other colour—with green wheels and upholstery. One of its many merits was that it was infinitely roomier than it appeared—and I had sat in several cars that were just the other way round. Its engine was rubber-mounted, which was a new idea then. You could read the oil-level from a dial on the dashboard, though I'm afraid that in my own car this didn't always work. And it had a free-wheel, which was to be an absolute joy in London, though at hilly Rooklington I rather hesitated to drive all the time on the brakes. I wasn't surprised, though again I was rather disgracefully annoyed, when it turned into a best-seller, and one began passing another Rover almost every few yards.

So that, for the time being, was that, for I couldn't get delivery at once, and must still go around in the Morris for a bit, and look at it partly with guilty sentiment and partly, I am afraid, with contempt. Now also, it was November, with lots more of the Wodehouses, with other evenings at plays and films—it was in this month that we saw *The Bells* for the first time, with Sir John Martin-Harvey in it, and at last I watched the scenes in a theatre to which J. M. B.'s imitations of Irving had once introduced me as a puzzled child—and with a switch-over from the short stories to revision of what I still thought was to be called "Summer's Lease." And *Chelbury Abbey* was published this month, with another jacket by Ernest Shepard, and was kindly treated on the whole.

So into December, and the last days of frightful suspense before the arrival of the new car. I forgot to mention just now that it had four doors again, which maybe taken as another sign that I no longer

regarded my children as incapable of leaving door-handles alone. But I doubt if I were thinking of them, or of anything but what a wonderful present I had just given myself, when suddenly, in the middle of the second week, the garage rang up and said that it was there. I rushed round at once. I eyed it with awe and admiration. Again I sniffed that half-forgotten scent of new upholstery and rubber and hot paint. I trembled a bit, for think of the first scratch—Diana, by the way, never gets fond of a car at all until at least one wing has been dented—and think, which one always forgets until this moment, of the stiffness and strangeness of the new controls. But I took it out forthwith, with my family and the dogs, too, and listened eagerly for the compliments that I soon received.

Then I took it back again, and parked it reverently on the Morris's old stand. But I still saw the Morris for quite a while, for it had been sold to another client of the same garage, and from the way he treated it I should say that Diana and he would have got on well; for on every occasion that it whizzed past me, it seemed that it must have run into something else. Yet the Morris didn't look reproachful, for I don't think that cars really have souls. They have tempers and temperaments, undoubtedly; I've never known one that didn't react to praise by developing trouble, or to curses—yes, and to kicks in extreme cases—by immediately giving of its best. But beyond this point they are only projections of the owner's immortal spirit, and when he deserts them they're just as faithful or faithless to someone else. Not like dogs, in fact. Not like Topsy and Victoria. Though, of course, the notion of deserting either of these companions had never entered my head.

I went mildly mad over another play this month. Not the nativity play at Brompton Church, in which my children took part—on the strength of an association between its vicar and their school—and of which I saw little or nothing from a side seat in a gallery. But a farce with a few tunes in it, into which I slipped on a Wednesday matinée. The house wasn't at all full, and the cast contained at least two comedians at whom I had never smiled before. But something had happened this time. The farce, if you can imagine anything more ominous, was about stolen jewellery. But, my hat, it was funny! It was brilliantly funny. Even those two comedians were funny, and everyone else was funny or clever, too. I laughed so loudly that the orchestra, not having much else to do at the

moment, all stood up to look at me over their railing. I went forth immediately as an evangelist of this production, and may perhaps have persuaded two or three people to share my bliss. And I went back myself, with my family and little Dorothy, who all split their respective sides, too. By *Jingo*, that play was funny. Yet it only just topped a hundred performances, and at no point, I believe, did it really pay its way. Either it was too funny, then, or there was some theatrical curse on it; for indeed it deserved more success. I tell you, even the third act was funny. In fact, I'm not sure it wasn't the funniest of the lot. A salute, therefore, and a smile and a tear, for *That's A Pretty Thing*, by Stanley Lupino, with music by Noel Gay, under the management of Peter Haddon—who also appeared in it, and was frightfully funny too—at Daly's Theatre at the end of 1933. If you missed it, I can only pity you. And there must be pity for poor Peter Haddon, for it was the beginning and end of his management, and it ought to have earned him a knighthood at least.

Diana and I went to yet another play in the week before Christmas; which was *Escape Me Never*, starring Miss Elisabeth Bergner, at the Apollo. And what did I think of this? Well, a young man and a young woman came in, a little late, to the seats next ours, and they were in high spirits, and started talking to each other. As they continued their sprightly conversation, I darted a number of poisonous looks at them, and eventually I was goaded into a loud "Sh!" This helped to spoil Diana's evening, but hadn't the slightest effect on the talkers, who came in late again after both intervals, and were still prattling gaily when the last curtain fell. So that's what I thought of *Escape Me Never*; and perhaps if J. M. B. had seen it in the same circumstances, he wouldn't have written *The Boy David*. And if he hadn't done that— But no; that's much too vast a speculation. He was going to write it, and all the other results—some of which are still going on—must follow as the Fates had planned. But nobody, not even J. M. B. himself, had had a glimpse of even one of them yet.

On the next day we set forth for Rooklington—the Rover's first long run—and made a successful trip in spite of a good deal of fog. But, oh, it was cold there! Fires and electric stoves all over the house seemed to make no difference at all, and I sat in the drawing-room not only in an overcoat but in a thick scarf and a hat as well.

Yet slowly the atmosphere thawed, the fog lifted, and when we met our children at Lewes next day, we brought them back to what seemed comparative warmth. And then we were all in our own house for Christmas, though not, which I had never imagined to be possible in such circumstances, in London. Rather interesting. And rather exciting. Some prejudices left me, for if I am a bad guest and a poor host, at least I appreciate being among my own things; and already—extravagantly yet in a sense providently—I was acquiring a duplicate of almost everything, so that in the end I could travel from one house to the other with no more luggage than a sheaf of manuscript. The leafless trees had again rather accentuated the high roof—though one of our good deeds last summer had been to remove a row of perforated tiles from its ridge—yet the sense of possession was still at work, and it was quite true—or almost true—that if you looked at the house from the corner by the garden tool-shed, this prospect wasn't really too bad. Stimulated by this and other illusions, I seem to have done a good deal of Christmas shopping myself for once, though at the very last moment and only in Splashcliff. And then there were our own turkey and plum-pudding, with titbits for the dogs, and Christmas greetings and meetings with all Diana's relations. As a further source of temporary satisfaction, I had practically finished cutting, modifying, and typing the text of "Summer's Lease."

So the last days rushed by, and on the last day of all we drove over to lunch with the Milnes at their cottage, and attended a New Year's Eve dinner-party, and subsequent musical evening, at the Bruce Ottleys', who lived in some ingeniously converted farm-buildings about two miles away. For Bruce is another of my Balliol friends; though I suppose he has at least twenty other friends of his own for every one of mine. At Balliol, to the best of my recollection, he spent all his waking hours at the piano; and now, though he had developed into something of a business potentate, he still sat at the keyboard and still imitated a barrel-organ when asked. So I was anything but alone when the clock struck twelve and we all drank punch and sang Auld Lang Syne. Yet Auld Lang Syne had a special meaning for me, for it also meant a far-off room in the Garden Quad, where Bruce's music had done a good deal to soothe my young and so often tormented soul.

Back, then, in the Rover to the waiting Pokes, and all to bed. A



year with plenty of output. A year of continued adjustment to the gap beneath the tight-rope, yet a year in which the net had suddenly come right up beneath it, and had almost tossed us, as it now seemed, into a comfortable country house. Diana's parents, as I should have said long ago, had gone off to South Africa in September, where her father was now doing a lot of valuable though unpaid work, and this is why there had been no Sunday lunches since then, and why a hint of further peninsulation may possibly have crept into the record. But of course there was another hint, last January, of something much more disturbing, if only we had known it. I didn't want to bring Adolf Hitler into this work, but it will be a job to keep him out now that we have drifted into 1934. I still only knew what the newspapers told me, and that, if anyone cares to look back at them, was remarkably little and not altogether consistent. If the Government knew more than this, it didn't say so. Neither did it seem to be seeking the new Chancellor's friendship or alternatively to be preparing for a second war. I thought, as far as I thought at all, in terms of Locarno and the Kellogg Pact. And if this weren't nearly far enough, who was I—in my own niche, with my own job, and with no authoritative warning—to suppose that another and much more fatal drift had already begun? War couldn't come again if living people remembered the last one; and how could they possibly forget? So if things were getting worse, of course somebody would notice it and do something. Why didn't they? Or why, when presently they began trying, did they all do the wrong thing? And why are so many of them still treating what has come to us as if they, too, were innocent victims of the Will of God, instead of blind, grown-up statesmen who couldn't stop playing with fire?

Ask me another.

## CHAPTER VIII

1934

FROM 1934 onwards my account-books all tend to turn into scrap-books and letter-files as well. Bad for the bindings, owing to a good deal of inward strain; but interesting, of course—to me, at any rate—

as messages from my friends come tumbling out, or as I lift a newspaper-cutting or snapshot to see what I had written on the page underneath. A special picture, which may often be regarded as symbolical of the year, was generally stuck inside the front cover now. And this year it shows a white Peke soaring over a rather low tennis-net. Not that I knew the Peke, or can immediately detect the symbolism in this case—though it shows, of course, that there was no faltering in my allegiance to the breed. But it's a charming illustration—taken, I should gather, from some weekly periodical—and I have wasted a lot of time this morning in gazing at it again.

Yet at last I turned over, and passed some now rather mystical figures which I think show how I was trying to prepare for sudden blows (like illness and income-tax) by falsifying my actual balance at the bank; and so come to another January, with all its Club subscriptions and quarterly bills again. I see, too, that we returned to Church Street on January 3rd, Diana's record reminds me that there was another fog, and a third note-book—which I defy my literary executors either to read or understand—reveals to about the only character who can interpret my handwriting that I was off at once on short stories again. I had a touching and rather embarrassing treat on the following Saturday afternoon, when Mary insisted on spending some of her Christmas tips on taking me to a matinée. I paid for our transport and she let me buy the programme, and it wasn't—which was so awkward for both of us—a very good play. But though of course I thanked her again and again, I couldn't help feeling guilty and mean. For, of course, though there was no stopping her, and there never is when she is generous, fathers of fourteen-year-old daughters oughtn't to accept a present like this.

We had new neighbours in Mallord Street now. One of them was Miss Gracie Fields, to whom I never spoke, though our Pekes frequently had a few words with hers. And another was Leslie Banks—with wife and three daughters—with whom there was a link; so that now we began entertaining each other, and saluting each other as I still went sauntering, for Pekingese or other reasons, round the block. An entry shows that all this began on the day after that matinée with Mary, when the Bankses asked us to tea. And no doubt it would be going on still, if both families hadn't been driven from both houses.

Anne was twelve on January 12th, and again there was a tea-

party of contemporaries at Church Street, with games and prizes, and Diana almost collapsing at the end. Moira and Michael Hopwood were there, of course, and Audrey may have looked in. But poor Frank, who had always known so much more about cars than I did, had just suffered the pain and indignity of being knocked down by an omnibus, and was now in a nursing-home. So we went to see him, two days later, found him recovering and as philosophical as ever, and arranged that he should dine with us as soon as he was let out.

And then the children went back to school, a little earlier than usual so that their term might be clear of Easter at the other end; but I knew what Anne was really thinking of, for there had been signs of it already. She wanted, or thought she wanted, another pet; for though Ernest had been followed by several white rats, the last of these short-lived creatures had succumbed some months ago. So it was to be a kitten, she said. And I said: "What about Bully?" And Diana, incorrigible as always under this sort of temptation, said that Bully would be all right if we kept the dining-room door shut, and had spent a whole morning at the beginning of January taking Anne round to places where a kitten might be bought.

But there weren't any. It was the wrong season, or the pet-shops despised them, or there was no market now that so many people were moving into flats. I took this calmly, for I was still thinking of Bully. But Anne stuck to her project, and had only been back at school for five days when she returned with the gift from a colleague of a large, plain, adolescent cat.

I'm afraid I was rather disgusted, for if there had to be such an addition to the establishment, at least I should have had the fun of playing with something very small that ran after bits of screwed-up paper on the end of a string. But Charles, as Anne had at once decided to call him, was already long past that stage. He was lanky. He was anything but graceful. And he hadn't, apparently, the least wish to play with me or anyone else. He had white paws, a white chest, and white cheeks and chin. He seemed to be wearing a black mask, like a Harlequin's, though the resemblance stopped here, for everything else was black, too. He had large, green, unfriendly eyes. Yes, I'm afraid I was bitterly disappointed by him, and as for the dogs, they paid no attention to him at all.

Yet here he was. The rule about the dining-room door was

instantly brought into force. Charles showed no more affection for Anne than for anyone else. He couldn't catch mice, because there weren't any. He could and did attempt to catch pigeons and sparrows in the garden, lurking for this purpose in various ambushes; but I don't think he ever succeeded. He made one experimental assault on the goldfish, fell into the water—I'm rather glad to say—and didn't try again. He did a good deal of heavy sleeping in the kitchen.

And yet, though his somewhat shallow intelligence still hid itself behind a good deal of reserve, he had decided to stay with us. He was getting to know the other gardens at the back of the house, and had found another and even uglier cat with whom to conduct a feud. He began developing that eccentricity in the choice of a couch which marks so many cats who are settling down. He was particularly fond of getting into cupboards, letting himself be locked in, and remaining there without a mew or murmur until—sometimes after a search lasting more than twenty-four hours—his retreat was discovered, and he came calmly out. Once, indeed—but this was some years later—he got himself screwed into the roof by a carpenter at Rooklington, let me rip away the boarding and put it back again, and then—in desperation—repeat the original and destructive process, before he chose to emerge. He never knew love among his own species, for Mr. Batt had seen to this; and sometimes, I think, he had a vague notion that he was human, or again that he was some kind of dog. In the country, for instance, he used regularly to start out with the real dogs on their walks; until suddenly some doubt seemed to strike him, and he would put up a tremendous pretence of only having followed them by chance. He was a humorist, in a way, or at any rate if he did something silly and was laughed at, he liked to do it again. He could move, like all cats, as silently as a ghost. Yet every now and then there were sounds on the stairs or landings as of a cart-horse welcoming the spring; and this was Charles in another of his inexplicable aspects. At Rooklington there were mice for him, and it was his duty, no doubt, to kill them—though I had to intervene if I found him playing with them first. But at Rooklington, also, there were birds' nests, and in his earlier and more agile days, though we tied a bell on him and kept him stuffed with food, I'm afraid that his instincts led to some very painful scenes. Later, however, he put on a good deal of weight—in fact, there's no question

that in our own eyes he became very handsome after all—and the fledglings were safer again, and Charles was one of us, and this was how it should always have gone on. But it didn't, though Charles lived longer than Topsy. The war took his houses and his food from him, and he had to be gently and mercifully wafted away. Poor Charles. . . .

The children didn't even wait for February this year before going to bed with colds, and when Anne recovered she was almost immediately sent home again in quarantine. But though this was exasperating—and no less so, perhaps, because I then took out a special insurance policy, and neither child was ever put in quarantine again—Diana and I were both spared, and work, and the Zoo, and all the rest of it went on. More evenings with the Wodehouses, at their house or ours. More dinners with J. M. B. A private performance by the Maxtone-Graham family, in their latest Chelsea home, of a children's play about the Monster of Loch Ness; with Mrs. Miniver as the Monster. And a punctilious visit on my own part to a public performance—though most of her time was being spent in film-studios now—of a play in which little Dorothy was the heroine. Another short run, though this wasn't her fault. And there would be luck, of two kinds, for little Dorothy before so very long.

Diana still visiting the Rooklington garden at least once a month, and returning with flowers and a handful of country grass or other titbits for Bully. And then look at what suddenly tumbles out of my account-book, from the week including February 14th. A Valentine from Mary! Very sweet of her, and it reached me, as it should, anonymously; but there was no doubt who had drawn that picture in coloured inks, whatever queries might be raised as to the strict suitability of fathers receiving Valentines from daughters, or as to this daughter's choice of design. The art-class, which she was still attending, was ultimately responsible, perhaps, and the drawing is decorative enough. But it does represent a well-developed young woman smiling at me in a completely diaphanous dress. And I laughed then and I laugh now, for the spirit of the Windmill Theatre had certainly informed my daughter's innocent pen. What a Valentine! But of course I've put it carefully back again, for I'm still touched by it, and neither of us is the least ashamed.

More dates to remind the rest of the world of February, 1934. A visit to the film called *The Private Life of Henry VIII*—but at a

local cinema, so that it was no longer brand-new—which I appear, in rather a haughty and highbrow manner, to have considered vulgar. A visit—but it was the first run, this time—to the Garbo film of *Queen Christina*, at which the same mood seems to have obtained. And a visit, at the end of its opening week, to Noel Coward's *Conversation Piece* at His Majesty's, where all my criticism—and Diana's too—was willingly cast aside. Perhaps I could see, in my calmer moments, that it was mainly a vehicle for the enchanting Mlle Printemps. Or perhaps, until we went back and fell under its spell again, I could reflect that no author can be a satirist and a sentimentalist with the same degree of sincerity. But the proof of a play is in its effect at the moment, and that was all right with us. I told J. M. B. about it, and learnt, of course, that he had been at the dress-rehearsal. But he was generous and appreciative, too; though already this was the period when all talk of the theatre, or, indeed, of anything else, came round in a very few minutes to Miss Elisabeth Bergner. Not yet, however, had he told me why.

Three days later Diana's parents returned from South Africa, and her almost daily expeditions to Kensington began again. And then she and Mary both caught colds. And thus we arrive at the evening in March when three authors and their wives assembled in the drawing-room at Church Street to welcome and pay homage to that rising young actress, Miss Dorothy Hyson. The Wodehouses, the Milnes, and the Mackails. I put in that bit about assembling like that because I'm afraid the chief guest of the occasion was a little late. This was her only fault then, she has now cured it, and in any case there was much else on her mind. But she was worth waiting for, since either she had put on her very prettiest frock or else there was a radiance that would have made any frock look pretty. Was this the child who had once perched on a sofa in her mother's dressing-room, who had come to tea with us on Campden Hill and turned head over heels in the nursery, who—as I knew in a sense, though I could no longer believe it—had once been afflicted with a schoolgirl's dental plate? It was, though; for she still laughed at my jokes. And the Wodehouses, who hadn't met her since she was a babe in arms in America, and the Milnes, who had never met her before, were all immediately overwhelmed. From the moment of her arrival the evening went with a bang.

You may have noticed, however, that in one respect I wasn't—

superficially—the perfect host; for at the formal dinner—at which the authors and their wives had all put on their best clothes, too—we were an odd number and there was no extra man. Yet there were two good reasons for this. The first was that none of us wanted an extra man, because we all wanted to talk to little Dorothy ourselves—and, anyhow, it was a round table, and there was precious little formality once we had all sat down. While the second, subtler, and secret reason, known only to Diana, little Dorothy, and myself, was that the chief guest of the evening had lost all interest in extra men as any kind of partner, because she was now very quietly and confidentially engaged. I have it in my mind, in fact, that she wasn't only the last to arrive but the first to leave, and that she left in a manner suggesting that she was equipped with wings. If so, she was undoubtedly off to the Haymarket Theatre, where an actor called Robert Douglas was starring in a play called *Ten Minute Alibi*. For this, as you might say, was the One. I hadn't asked her if she were sure it was the One, because I knew so very well in which direction her head was screwed on. If she had made up her mind—and I knew well enough, too, that despite her extreme youth there had been plenty of other applicants already—then that settled it, and Diana and I approved. Not that either of us had seen the winner yet, and not that our approval was the least necessary. Still there it was, and of course it was a compliment that we had been told so soon; for as a matter of fact there was still some lack of complete approval elsewhere. Well, naturally. If a mother has a daughter as young and pretty as all that, of course she doesn't hand her over without a qualm or pang. So little Dorothy must be patient for a while, as Diana and I had once tried to be, and most certainly neither of us was going to interpose or interfere. We were to watch, with immense affection for both mother and daughter, and with no prejudice—because we took the daughter's word here—against the third figure in the case. We wanted everyone to be happy; though it is quite true, also, that our only contribution to this, so far, was to radiate somewhat silent goodwill. As a professional in my own line, however, I could see that it was a very interesting story. For all my imaginary heroines were young and pretty, and of course it was much more gratifying when one of them had these qualities, and others perhaps even more admirable, in real life.

So little Dorothy flitted away in her white dress, and the three

authors and their three wives sat back with six smiles and sighs, and resumed the evening on a slightly more elderly note. And the Milnes would be back again, many a time and oft. But it was this year that the Wodehouses again let their London house and started living at Le Touquet, so that still there would be letters and still we might hope to see them in this country from time to time. No longer, though, might any telephone bell mean that Plum was coming round on one of his great walks, or that the Mackails were to be asked to another Wodehouse meal. We kept in touch, we had news from Leonora—whose little daughter was born this spring and who was now well and firmly anchored in Kent—and the old friendship was still there. But the great years were rushing to an end now, for Chelsea and Le Touquet were much too far apart. I'm still grateful, though, and I always shall be. They were good years as long as they were allowed to last.

Diana had one of her particular treats just a week after that dinner-party, when her father invited her to ride in the special train which transported the directors of the L.M.S. and their friends to the Grand National. From her account of these outings—which I could have attended myself, but never did, owing to equal reluctance to leave my work and to see any kind of steeplechase—I gather that comfort and luxury weren't spared. They had breakfast on the train—which was the last to leave Euston—they had drinks, they had lunch, they were shunted into a siding from which they toddled a few yards to their own stand. They saw the race—"Lovely day," says Diana's entry this year, "and no accidents." They toddled back again. They had tea, they had cocktails, they had a glorious dinner with still more champagne. And theirs was the first race-train, also, to complete the return trip. The shareholders weren't charged for any of this. It was a private and spontaneous exhibition of sportsmanship and generosity on the part of the Board. But of course the Board had advantages, and at least one of their guests enjoyed every moment of the day. Good, again. I was just finishing my own dinner, with a dog on each side of me and a bullfinch in the corner, when a happy though rather exhausted Diana drove up in a taxi. She told me everything, which was one of the rules, and this was when my own pleasure began, too. For I didn't like train-journeys, I didn't like crowds, I didn't like this sort of spectacle, and I didn't really like losing my



money to bookmakers. But I liked hearing about all these experiences from Diana; and furthermore—prig and poltroon that I was—I had put in a full and successful day at my desk. So I was happy, too, as we circled the block together, accompanied by both dogs. "You *must* come next year, if you get the chance," said Diana. And every time I said and thought that I would.

Another of our evenings with J. M. B.—but he still wasn't telling us that he was writing anything—and then we were all rallying round Mary, for her confirmation at St. Luke's Church; where, by the way, Charles Dickens was married. Yes, this was the stage that she had reached now, and only three days later she became fifteen. I gave her a tip, which she preferred now to something from a shop, though I knew that this saved me trouble; and in the evening we all dined out at a restaurant and went on to see a play called *Mr. Whittington* at the Hippodrome.

The next day the school term ended, and we set off for Rooklington at once. As usual, the car took a lot of luggage, and Diana, and the dogs, and Bully, and myself; while the children and staff came on by train, with Charles in the basket shaped like a kennel which had once been bought for Topsy. As usual, also—at any rate from now onwards—both dogs slept heavily as we bowled along, though in a car it was always Victoria who settled down first; yet always, as I took the last turning from the coast road into our own *cul-de-sac*, both dogs simultaneously woke up. How did they know? They could see nothing of the scenery as they lay on Diana's lap, and surely there was no local smell that was stronger than petrol and oil. Nor had Diana or I said anything in the nature of "Here we are," or given the faintest sign. But they knew. They were scrambling to their feet; they were trying to look out of the window; they were completely aware that in another three minutes we should have reached their country home. Quite inexplicable, but quite infallible. They never made a mistake.

And here we were, in the keen, fresh air, back again at our Gothic porch. I switched off the engine, and started unloading, while Diana—again as always—took the dogs to see what had been happening in the garden. How good that first tea was, with milk that tasted and looked like milk, and butter—even though it was actually Danish—such as Chelsea could never produce. Then came the rest of the party, whom I met at the station and brought back for a second tea.

And Charles was released, and walked away rather stiffly at first, with a tail registering considerable displeasure. But soon forgot those hours in the basket, as he, too, was wheedled into the house and fed.

Then we took the dogs out for a short but proper walk. And thus it was that I suddenly saw those ominous pegs in the field across the road.

"Hullo!" I said. "I don't like this. Have you heard anything? It can't—it *can't* be a bungalow!"

Diana, however, had heard nothing, and we were both left to guess. But a few days later some men appeared and began digging, and then one morning there was a pile of bricks. We consulted an oracle in the village, and learnt, to our horror, that the farmer had sold a strip of his land, after all. The alleged excuse was that he had sold it to a friend or to someone introduced by a friend, and as a matter of fact, as the walls began rising, we saw that it wasn't going to be a bungalow, but a singularly inoffensive little house. Yet one of our views, from Anne's bedroom and the new bathroom, would no longer show nothing but downs. In the summer, when the sycamores were in full foliage, there would still be no change from these windows. But in summer and winter alike our isolation had been challenged, and with all the selfishness of an oldest inhabitant I plunged into black despair.

"You'll see," I said. "He'll sell some more bits now. This is going to be Peacehaven all over again. In a year or two I expect we'll be looking out at a row of shops."

Yes, I'm afraid I suspected the farmer—though a little later, when he did sell another plot to George Hughes, and George began building a house on it, I never turned a hair. And I was quite wrong about the shops, and wrong—at any rate for several more holidays—about development on even the most distant parts of the estate. Yet the threat hung over us, and whenever the downs looked particularly beautiful my morbid vision peppered them with Tudor villas and asbestos garages. If I saw a man bearing the faintest resemblance to a surveyor, my blood ran cold. I never failed to eye those weather-beaten notice-boards, in case they should suddenly say "Sold."

Was no one else to live on the South Coast except myself, then? Was the farmer to go on farming a potential gold-mine merely to satisfy my desire for solitude and dislike for mass-produced front doors? Was one who spent far less than half the year in this paradise

to insist on keeping everyone else out? Was he to deny the rights not only of speculative builders, but of all the families who wanted to have seaside houses too? I saw these points. But then I'd seen the coast between Newhaven and Brighton—yes, and miles beyond that—and I remembered it at the beginning of the century, and I couldn't, I just *couldn't* feel that the change represented progress. Personal prejudice and my own æsthetic comfort may well have been the strongest motives in my mind. Yet who could really defend this slap-dash ravaging of England? I thought about it a great deal. I talked to George Hughes about it. He knew a great deal more than I did about zoning, and town-planning, and the powers of the Ministry of Health. But in the end we both agreed that it all depended on money. A rich syndicate could ruin us. A benevolent millionaire could save us. But though there were still plenty of rich syndicates in the offing, neither of us knew a benevolent millionaire.

At the beginning of April I switched off short stories again, and started another novel. Of course I had been thinking about it first, though even I couldn't tell you at what moment the germ appeared. I had been taking it for walks, I had slept on it and lain awake with it, and for weeks if not months I had been making mysterious little notes about it in a secret little book. I had had my great glimpse which had shown me the whole thing. I had lost this—as I always did—and had started reconstructing it from the ground upwards. But now, though the notes suddenly seemed appallingly scanty, and I could remember little of the glimpse except the beginning and end, I knew that the time had come to make a start. Reason and traces of literary conscience might tell me to wait for a full scenario, but instinct—and experience, too—advised me that it was better to jump into deep water than to stand for ever on the brink. So I jumped in, and began writing the novel that was to be called *The Wedding*. Again it was to have no plot, in the ordinary sense, and again its events were all to take place in one day. But the latter restriction should be a great help in pulling things together, and how could one possibly describe a wedding in detail without telling a story—or, indeed, a number of stories—at the same time? Naturally I had chosen the class that I knew best—the slightly upper middle class, that's to say—and inevitably, when the time came, I should be scolded by reviewers for neglecting the unemployed. And naturally the scene was to be laid in London, because I had never been to a

country wedding in my life. Meanwhile, I certainly seemed to be on to an idea; though on one morning I should be overwhelmed by unwanted details, and on the next, having cut them out, I might suddenly wonder if I knew anything about weddings at all. But selection and compression were the main tasks in this book, and soon enough the characters were showing that encouraging independence which often leads to the waste-paper basket, yet at the same time warms their creator's heart. It was in this novel, also, that the first shadow of war appears, though it is small enough, and many readers may have missed it. It shows me now, though, that even in the spring and summer of 1934 I wasn't altogether blind to the future. Another threat was touching me, too, now. I tried not to think of it. So often I told myself that statesmen *must* be wiser than their utterances: that they *couldn't* betray us so swiftly and easily again. Yet there was the little shadow on my pages. For there could be no weddings now without someone wondering how soon those whom God had joined together might be parted by another call to arms.

We went over to tea one day with my cousin Lorna, who is a sister of my cousin Di, and of whom I am also remarkably fond. She, too, had the feeling for Sussex that comes from a happy childhood there, and again we talked about far-off summer holidays, and euonymus and elm-trees, and shingle on the garden paths, and picnics and blackberries on the downs. And on the same day our first guest arrived to stay at Rooklington, though as this was Moira Hopwood, some people might say that she was Mary's guest rather than ours. The thought just faintly crossed my mind that if we were going to have visitors in a country house of our own now, we ought to have a visitors' book, too. But we never did. There were lots of guests before we left—only a few days later, for instance, two more of Mary's friends took Moira's place—and we were always glad to have them. But somehow we never provided one of those volumes with which one rushes after a guest just as he or she is already a bit late for the train, or at which one gazes with baffled regret after having forgotten to produce it at all. I know, too, why I never took this step. It wouldn't be lucky. It would symbolize permanence. And though I was quite capable of imagining my grandchildren coming to stay here, and of considering just where we should put them and their nurse, I thought I knew better than to tempt the

Fates in this way. Not that this caution would make the slightest difference in the end.

Back to Church Street—where the builder had been washing the outside of the house—at the end of April, accompanied, of course, by our troupe of pets. A few days before the beginning of the summer term, because Diana's father had asked her to present the prizes at the L. M. S. sports. I wish I'd been there, now—but I wouldn't leave my work—for the photographs which subsequently reached us were both charming and impressive. My beloved wife contriving to look generous and gracious, yet at the same time to make it quite clear that she hadn't really bought all those medals and cups. Very touching, I thought, and so typical of her extraordinary honesty. We also concluded the Easter holidays with another family evening at a musical play. But I shan't give its name, for it was a dreadful disappointment. Even the children knew this time that theatres aren't always a source of undiluted joy.

Then they went back to school once more, and scholastically speaking it was summer again. I was plodding along at *The Wedding*. I was invited to call on a New York literary agent at the Savoy, and went through one of those rather awkward sessions—for this was neither the first nor the last—at which he told me that he could sell my short stories in America, and I told him he couldn't. I was right, of course, and presently he would find this out. Presently, also, he would be beseeching me to be less English and to pay closer attention to the models in the *Saturday Evening Post*. But though I was far from despising its scale of payment, I never can read stories that suddenly turn into small print among the advertisements. And if I tried to be less English—though I never quite knew what this meant—it only resulted in complaints from the editors at home. I think the agent did actually sell one story, to a Chicago newspaper, after re-writing most of it himself. But this triumph wasn't repeated, and I remained either an artist or a fool. Or both, perhaps, to take a hopeful view of it. And not that I'm dreaming of criticising the Americans.

This makes me smile, in Diana's engagement-book, on May 9th—which was the day after Victoria's fourth birthday. "With Mummie and Mary to see Nelson Keys in a revue—*most unsuitable for Mary.*" And then, in Mary's own handwriting: "This is not true." As I didn't see the revue myself, I can't judge here. I think both parties

were probably right, from their own point of view. And it shows, and again it doesn't show, how Mary was growing up. Well, here's another sign, only three days later and from the same record, that at any rate she was getting no younger. "Mary's permanent wave." Help! Very necessary, no doubt, in view of the prevailing fashion. But when I first knew Mary, she hadn't got any hair at all.

We all spent Whitsun at Rooklington this year; Diana and I taking practically a fortnight, and the children coming down for week-ends. Her parents were stopping at Eastbourne and looking at furnished houses near us for August and September. One or two banquets in their hotel sitting-room, and of course a cut from the cold buffet for Topsy and Victoria. And another guest for Mary over Whitsun itself. And a sudden night out for Diana—but I wasn't going to pay two guineas and get my evening clothes down from London—at the Glyndebourne opera. We ought, no doubt, to have made much more of this institution; if we didn't go ourselves, we should at least have let our house for the season; for Glyndebourne was only a few miles away. But I wouldn't dress up. I still don't regret the buttercups and cowslips that I saw instead; and, sometimes, when I stepped into a train at Victoria on a sunny afternoon, and found it full of powdered women in low necks and perspiring men in stiff shirts, I knew that music—even good music—wasn't worth such sacrifices as these. Or not, most certainly, to me.

So then we came back to Chelsea, and it was the end of May, which is another way of saying the beginning of June, and almost at once I was forty-two. The birthday celebrations were of a very quiet nature, consisting of lunch with Diana's parents and a Church Street dinner attended by my own. I received some tribute on a small scale from a very few people, but though part of one still hopes for a box of bricks and a toy tricycle at any age that I have yet reached, reason shows that one is lucky to be remembered at all. Diana sent me off to my literary-dramatic Club to take a ticket in its Derby sweepstake—which I doubt if she would have succeeded in doing if I hadn't been a little elevated by my birthday—and in due course my pound was distributed among some members who didn't need it. This, of course, shows how my expenses were creeping up on my income; of which there was another symptom a few days later. I'd bought some City of Cologne Bonds at the end of 1928 for £382. I sold them three years later for £195 19s., and bought some

German Government Bonds instead. Now I sold these, too, for rather less than they had cost me, though for considerably more than they would have been worth if I had waited; and I still can't make out who pocketed the money that I lost. I have absolutely no doubt, though, that my original investment—so warmly recommended by the City of London—passed soon enough into the manufacture of munitions, and that's the only thing that I regret. May I remind you that the City of London almost forced its treasure on the Germans at this epoch, and then kept forcing more on them so that they could pay the interest on what they had been given already? If it hadn't done this, the Germans might just possibly have starved. But as it did do it, the Germans still went short of a number of foodstuffs, and spent the money on preparing to sack the City of London. Was this wisdom? I should say not, at the present epoch, though you see how I helped to pay for some bombs myself. But then this was never explained to me by the City of London, and indeed at this time I was encouraged to believe that the Germans consisted of nothing but nudists and film-actors. Yet the root of all evil remained what it had always been, and so did the utter mystery of international finance.

On June 15th, which was the seventeenth anniversary of our wedding-day, Diana and I went out to dinner at the Savoy Grill-Room, and on to the first performance of a play called *Touch Wood* at the Haymarket Theatre, in which little Dorothy was playing an important part. We clapped loudly, I, too, was touched, and with the assistance of the rest of the public she was now in for a really good run. *Ten Minute Alibi*, which I still hadn't seen, had moved to another theatre, where it was still going strong; but so was the secret engagement—though perhaps it wasn't quite such a secret now—so that all seemed favourable for two futures in which I took a good deal of interest. Presently I should again be having the impudence to tell little Dorothy how I thought she could improve her very admirable performance, and again she would exhibit the utmost patience with me. But there was a bond, you see—nearly ten years of it now—and I should never have objected if she had told me how to write my books.

On an evening in the following week we took the Milnes—though in their own car—to another illuminated night out at the Zoo; and again it was beautiful and romantic, though I did rather wonder if

some of the animals appreciated being flood-lit. And on the next afternoon, with a considerable weight on my spirits, I caught a train at Paddington and alighted once more at Oxford. The weight was due to an honour that had been paid me, for on June 22nd my College was holding a Gaudy, and it hadn't only invited me as a guest—which was still remarkably broad-minded of it—but had asked me to make a speech as well. I was terrified. It was true that I had once been President of an undergraduate debating-society—which would still, if I hadn't lost it, allow me to wear a rather decorative tie—but I couldn't remember ever addressing it. In fact, my impression is that I held this exalted office during a summer term, when there weren't any meetings at all. But in any case a few fumbling remarks to a room full of contemporaries were very different from the ordeal that lay before me now. Dons and old members of the College would be seated at the high table in Hall. Juniors—for at this Gaudy my own year was the oldest—would be gaping at me from all sides. I had nothing to say to any of them, no practice in anything but the written word, and again I was haunted by my father's reputation, on which once more, I was convinced, I was going to bring ignominy and shame.

However, at least I could *write* a speech. So I wrote one, and typed it out on little bits of paper—so that I could pull them out of my pocket when I broke down—but also set myself to learning it by heart. For days beforehand I walked round my study, muttering to myself. I continued to mutter all the way from Paddington to Oxford. And I shouldn't deny that there was more, very quiet muttering during the service in Chapel that was the first part of the proceedings. As we came out again, the present Master—who had once been one of my unfortunate tutors—was kind enough to inform me that he read my stories in the *Strand*. This had an appalling effect on me, for of course he really despised them, of course he had only said this from courtesy, and of course, in any case, my speech wasn't going to be the least like that.

So I withdrew, and went on muttering. I muttered all through the banquet. I sat with a glassy stare—for I was the last speaker on the list—while several brilliant experts made the rafters ring. The worst moment, perhaps, was almost the last one; for my duty was to second the final address, and it suddenly struck me that Godfrey Elton—who had somehow become Lord Elton since I had taken my



eyes off him—would be bound to deliver the precise phrases that I had prepared. If he did, I was finished. If he merely used one of them, I was quite incapable, at this stage, of any modification of my script. I doubt if he has ever been heard more attentively than by me on this occasion, or by an auditor who drew so few breaths. But it was all right. We hadn't overlapped. My name was pronounced, I hurriedly gave the sheets of paper to my neighbour—for it's no use trying to find one's pocket when one's paralysed—and then I rose to my feet.

Or I suppose I did. I also caught occasional, grating sounds from the tall figure in a dinner-jacket over whom I was now unsteadily hovering, somewhere in mid-air. But I hadn't muttered for all those hours in vain. The automatic mechanism worked. The speech was apparently delivered. And afterwards, so I am informed, not only was there considerable applause, but one of those older heroes actually told my father what a success I had been. This I should still very much like to believe. But I was bitten by no further urge for oratory, however I scraped through that test. No, thank you. Give me a pen, and I'll write about anything; for I'm on the rank, as it were, and, as editors have discovered, I at least always send them the right number of words and post them by the date that has been promised. But I don't speak; any more than I can bear listening to speeches. And if speaking, in this sense, were only forbidden to all—well, I think it would be a wonderful safeguard against war.

I enjoyed the rest of that Balliol evening, and as it was June now, I had no fear of being frozen to death in an undergraduate's bed. It was, certainly very hard, and even when bells weren't chiming there was a fairly continuous noise of traffic—so much heavier than in my own day—from St. Giles's just outside. In fact, I don't think I slept at all; but I had torn my speech up, I hadn't got to make it again, and though in the morning light my contemporaries seemed no younger or thicker on top—and one of them, good Heavens, had become some sort of Judge!—I was much more inured to these changes at forty-two than I had been, four years ago, at that Dean's Dinner. Yet still there was a sadness, not only for the contemporaries who had gone altogether, but because the Dean himself—my much-loved F. F. Urquhart—had been absent from the Gaudy, and was lying, very ill with heart trouble, in a near-by nursing home. Ought

I to try and see him? But others, who knew him far better, were planning their own visits, and he was in no state to receive either a procession or a crowd. My problem was one which occurs so often in real life; a choice between two courses, neither of which appears to be either entirely selfish or entirely unselfish. Afterwards I should inevitably feel that I had made the wrong choice, which was to write him a letter instead of attempting to call. The principle was sound, but I couldn't feel satisfied. When he died, in the following September, I must of course reproach myself again. Yet even a decision not to see me might have added to his burden that day. I give it up. I know, in any case, that he was another saint.

Back to London, then, and on Sunday a lunch-party of four Mackails and four Barrington-Wards at the Zoo. Robin had two little boys, and I had two rather large girls, and we all trailed round in the traditional manner on a very fine afternoon. For it was hot now, and at the beginning of July—which was when news reached England of mass-assassinations in Germany—it was very hot indeed. Again it was the month which for me is always the end of another year, and again there was an impulse, with two or three months of country just ahead, to plunge into some kind of social whirl, to stop being such a domesticated hermit, and to use all the Metropolitan opportunities that I was always allowing to slip by. Yet nothing much, I must admit, ever came of this mood. We dined with J. M. B. again, who had finished his play now, but was only indulging in the most distant and discouraging hints. We paid our third visit to *Conversation Piece*, now nearing the end of its run. And that—apart from one dinner-party, one cocktail-party, and the dentist—was about all. But it was a shorter period than usual, for either because of the heat-wave or because we were no longer nearly so frightened of the children's headmistress, we took them away before the end of the term, and were all down at Rooklington by July 15th. The new house across the road had got its roof on now, and I was still displeased about it. But the trees were thick and solid, too, and one could easily spend a whole day in our house and garden without seeing it at all. What about the notice-boards? Yes, they were still there and still unaltered, though presently there would be more rumours and I should be rushing off to discuss them with George Hughes.

Meanwhile, I had found a new title for my seventeenth novel, and

on July 19th it was published as *Summer Leaves*. Ingenious, in a way, for several of the characters were having summer leave, they were all having it in the country, and as a third interpretation one might think of the pages of the book. I feel now that if I could have made it a bit shorter, perhaps even as short as its forerunner, no great literary or artistic harm would have been done. But I couldn't at the time, for few authors can gain enough detachment until years afterwards, and I was too much of an old hand now for the publishers—whatever they may have thought—to insist on further cuts. So there it was. Not lacking charm in a way, or even appreciation. Though I could do a good deal to it with a blue pencil now.

And more or less at the same time—which is to say the end of July, when the excitement at Rooklington was a fire in the farmer's rick-yard, and the excitement elsewhere was the murder of Engelbert Dollfuss—I wrote the last page of *The Wedding*. All done in one spurt this time, though with many a doubt and distraction by the way. But that last page, for me at any rate, was nothing but pleasure and fun. The book began, you see, with a formal invitation to the wedding. And it ended, after the newly-married couple had driven away, with a supposed account of the proceedings in the daily Press. Thus, with Diana's assistance, I could at last tell you what the bride and bridesmaids wore. And I could also amuse myself by giving a list of the guests. It started, of course, with characters who had been named already, it added some more whom I invented on the spur of the moment, it included—though of course no one else would notice—quite a number of heroes and heroines from my earlier books, and it ended, to my intense delight, with the names of Miss Victoria Wormington and Mrs. Denis Mackail. Not that even Diana would ever have taken a Peke to a wedding—so that perhaps I don't really quite know who Miss Victoria Wormington was; but she would have gone herself, without the faintest doubt—while I made excuses and talked about my work—for she has always had a very romantic mind. So she went, apparently, to the Troutbeck-Pilgrim wedding—or at any rate the book said so—and I was quite sure that she had enjoyed it. Also that she had given a present that she couldn't really afford. Also that she had sent a card with it to suggest that it was my gift as well. Since Diana never does anything generous by halves.

I took a month's holiday now, with a good deal of bathing, much basking in the garden, a considerable consumption of figs, and some

distant though benevolent hospitality to more of Mary's friends. Visits were exchanged with the Milnes and the Hopwoods. The Darlings, again in the offing, but already on the look-out for a more permanent local address, were also invited to lunches and teas. And there was the Produce Show, as innocent and simple as ever. And Diana's parents were in a furnished house next door to one of her aunts, so that her father could constantly call on the donkeys, while her mother showed growing signs of becoming a real resident, too. At one point she was to take a house near Polegate, and at the next she had practically taken another near Lewes. There was a third house, that Diana was backing, and as this was the nearest I tried to put in a word for it as well. But no. The mystical moment of final decision was still postponed. The Polegate house was too near the railway. The Lewes house had no main water supply. The third candidate had some other disadvantage, and must also be turned down. Well, since the days when I first came to know them, Diana's parents had occupied five different country houses in five different counties, and they could still go wherever they chose. This freedom, I think, tended to make anything distant more attractive than anything on the spot, and the longer their Splashcliff tenancy lasted, the less they seemed to feel that this was the right place to settle down. So presently, as you'll see, they would be settling, for the first time, in Gloucestershire, with which there was no link at all. But the other signs and symptoms were clear enough. Some kind of Nonesuch, though naturally, in the circumstances, on a smaller scale, was obviously going to be revived.

It was in this August, also, that Charles the cat became so alarmingly ill. The first and almost incredible report was that he had refused his food. But then, almost at once, he sank into a kind of stupor, and—still more disturbing—the end of his nose turned blue. We summoned our local practitioner, the admirable Mr. Turnbull, from Lewes, who diagnosed something called Cat Distemper, and said that he must treat it at his clinic. I'm afraid that our first and unanimous question was whether the dogs could have caught it. But he was able to calm us, and we let him take Charles away. Personally, I must confess, I thought it was all up with the poor fellow, and that we should never see him again. But of course we telephoned constantly—though it would have been useless to send grapes or flowers—and though at first the bulletins were distinctly guarded,

they gradually improved. Charles, we learnt a little later, was rapidly becoming the most popular patient in the home. And twelve days after his departure he was restored to us with an exquisite pale-pink nose again, licking himself violently, and more than ready to wolf his liver or cod. What a relief. Well done, Mr. Turnbull, who now became country doctor to the dogs and donkeys as well. That was a real medical triumph in August, 1934, even though Bully's congratulations were a trifle insincere. For the poor little creature had been jumping about and whistling all this time with the garden door of the drawing-room wide open. While now, for Charles was ravenous and more active than ever, he must again put up with a couple of open windows.

Sad news from Chelsea, though. I haven't, I fear, said much of Peter the budgerigar lately, for the fact was that he had left us for a while, to stay, though in his own cage and with his own wife, with some budgerigars elsewhere. Then he had returned, a widower for the third time, and perhaps we should have taken him to Rook-lington, too; but we didn't, because he was old, and had had enough travels, and he would be well cared for—like the goldfish—at Church Street. This month, though, he died, and though he had never really been ours, we should miss his clambering and squawking; and again little Dorothy must be told. For four and a half years we had tried to do our best for him, even though we had accidentally lost his first wife; but I don't think he was really young when he first came to us, and always he had been self-centred and remote. Poor little bird. And yet he was luckier than some.

So that was the end of August, and the end of my holiday, too. On the first of September, with the manuscript of *The Wedding* safely awaiting revision in one of its drawers, I sat down at my desk again, and began writing my two hundred and twelfth short story. I know where the plot came from, too, though it was the best part of thirty years since a large wardrobe had fallen on me in Paris, and I had stood there, just able to support it but not strong enough to push it back again, until at last my cries were heard and I was rescued. Yes, I know that isn't a plot in itself, and of course my story was much more elaborate than that. Yet it was to this almost forgotten memory that my subconscious had quietly turned while I had been basking and bathing. "Here you are," it said; "and here's the rest of it." "Thank you," I said. "Yes, I think I can manage with that." So I

did, and was grateful to my sleepless partner. Though I did sometimes wish that he'd work as regularly as I did, and not do everything in sudden fits and starts.

I didn't aim at twelve hundred words on the first day, for I knew now that the mechanism must always be put gently into gear. So that I had rested, and even bathed again, by the time I drove to the station to meet our first grown-up guest. Or would you say not entirely grown-up? Well, of course one shouldn't say a child—though that's how her mother and I still speak of her—because she was confidentially engaged. At any rate, Diana and I rather than our own children had asked her, and of course she was Miss Dorothy Hyson, who had been taken ill in *Touch Wood*, and was now, by permission of the Haymarket Theatre, to have a week by the sea. So there she was, stepping out of the train on that interesting evening, and looking rather pale, though still with very bright eyes. If she saw anything wrong with our house, of course she didn't say so; she greeted everyone, including the dogs, with her special brand of good manners; she had dinner with us—and I managed to make her laugh once or twice—and then Diana put her to bed.

Of course the next thing that happened was that the telephone rang, and this was Robert Douglas, so that little Dorothy had to get up and come downstairs again, while the rest of us went out into the garden; the reason for that last move being that our telephone had been rather thoughtlessly installed in the hall. However, presently we crept back; and hurriedly retreated; and then crept back again; and little Dorothy, looking pinker now, said that the gentleman to whom she had just been speaking was coming down to see us all tomorrow. We all became rather excited; and still more so when she said that he was coming in an aeroplane.

This, of course, was both dashing and dramatic, though I doubt if it saved much time. For aeroplanes could neither start from London nor arrive at Rooklington, and when the traveller eventually descended about seven miles away, he still had to find a taxi, and the taxi still had to find our house. So little Dorothy spent a great deal of the morning at the end of our short drive, and sometimes we went out and encouraged her, but whenever we saw any kind of vehicle approaching, we dashed in again so as to be out of the way. There was considerable suspense, in other words, on that very fine Sunday morning; yet finally—though not, I gather, until it had been

round most of Sussex—the right vehicle did arrive, and there was the hero at last.

I was very nervous. I had never met him, and I was acutely conscious that though we all regarded his bride-to-be as an honorary Mackail, there was no earthly reason why he should do anything of the sort. He might easily, I thought, resent this assumption. Or he might loathe us all at sight, in which case we should probably never see little Dorothy again. However, after a decent interval I stepped out on to the lawn, and little Dorothy introduced us, and he certainly seemed to have very good manners, too. In fact, he took me distinctly aback by calling me "Sir."

In the middle of lunch the telephone rang again, and this time it was to impart the intelligence that the aeroplane—which had been piloted by a friend, and had also for some reason contained Robert Douglas's dresser—had crashed and been smashed at Shoreham, and that the dresser had broken his nose. We all looked solemn, but of course the Mackails were acquainted with neither the pilot nor his victim, while their guests had their own reasons for looking on the bright side of everything to-day. I'm afraid someone laughed. The disaster—though Douglas still remembered to look anxious every now and then—became, in fact, merely part of the general background, which was naturally in strong contrast to the brilliance of being confidentially engaged.

So we drove the hero and heroine to the beach, where the hero bathed. And we collected them, and brought them back for tea. And we left them alone. And then we gave them supper. And then I took Douglas to the station and put him on a train. By this time, at my own plaintive request, he had stopped calling me "Sir"; but I still called him Douglas, and still do, and so does little Dorothy, because Douglas is actually his Christian name, so that she, in more formal or unprofessional moments, has now turned into Mrs. R. D. Finlayson. The date of this great change, however, was still unknown in September, 1934, for there were still good grounds for considering her very young, and her mother (who happens to be staying with us as I write this bit) was still wondering if an actress should marry an actor. When I put this point to J. M. B., to whom I serially reported the whole affair, he said it was all right as long as she wasn't the better actor of the two; in which he showed more wisdom, unquestionably, than I did in passing his statement on. Yet I wasn't

really running a risk. For whichever in this case was the better—and I'm sure I don't know—little Dorothy's head was always screwed on the right way; so much so, indeed, that if Douglas's had been virtually detached from his body—though as a matter of fact it wasn't—he would still have been lucky and happy, and so would she. Or for as long, at any rate, as actors were spared the necessity of piloting aeroplanes of a much more deadly nature themselves.

Heavens, I was tired that evening, as I tottered round for a last, twilight walk with the dogs. But the match had my approval now—not that I had ever dreamt of withholding it—and this attitude was powerfully confirmed during the rest of little Dorothy's visit by the number of times that she was called to the telephone, and the extreme thickness of the envelopes, all in the same handwriting, which reached her by every post. For I, it would seem, must be rather romantic, too. On the Tuesday we were joined by Anne Darlington, and we all did the Lewes Races. On the Friday the Milnes came over for lunch, and took Anne Darlington back with them. And on the Sunday down came Robert Douglas again, but in a car this time, and stayed for another cold supper, after which he drove little Dorothy away. On the Monday she would be playing at the Haymarket again, and he would be playing at the Lyric, and I should be playing, in that sort of sense, with my output of short stories. But there had been a further advance with Douglas first, when I had confessed that none of us had ever seen *Ten Minute Alibi*, and when in spite of this he told Dorothy—who hastened to tell us, too—that he liked the Mackails and appreciated their manner of life. Here, then, was another compliment, and from a rather important source. Though we still haven't reached the biggest compliment of all.

More September days at Rooklington, with heavier dew at night-fall now, and a few leaves on the sycamores beginning to fade and fall. The drone of the farmer's threshing-machine. A gentle, golden light on the gently swelling downs. But at Church Street our kitchen had been repainted now, and at any moment the children must return to school. Diana and I lingered, while they still came down for week-ends, until well into October. And I ought, in a way, to have lingered longer, for there were fresh rumours of widespread building, and George Hughes and I were organizing a Rooklington deputation to the Splashcliff Urban District Council, to whose terri-



tory we had now been transferred, on October 15th. One of our difficulties was that we both liked the farmer, and quite saw that he was entitled to dispose of his own property. And George, in fact, had now bought a bit for himself. But a second difficulty was that we couldn't go on asking him just how the other negotiations stood; and that in approaching the Urban District Council at all we were rather implying that we, the small-holders, were the guardians of rural England, and that the farmer, who had lived and worked here all his life, was nothing of the sort. This wasn't our true feeling or intention, and I'm glad to say that he never showed the least annoyance with either of us. But it certainly added to the complications, as we drew up a masterly memorandum—which I typed, and George had duplicated at his office—and as at one moment we were told that the building was just about to begin, and at the next that the whole deal was off.

Nevertheless, on October 15th I returned from London for the day, and George, and I, and the Vicar, and another local representative, all presented ourselves at the Council Offices, and were kept waiting in a passage—just to teach us that we were only ratepayers—and were finally admitted to the presence of the City Fathers and Mothers. My deep-down impression, both then and now, was that none of them cared twopence if Rooklington were turned into a solid mass of bungalows and villas so long as the occupants shopped in Splashcliff and also paid their rates. For the Council's great ambition—and I'm not making this up—was to become a Borough Council and to be presided over by a Mayor with a Chain. Nor did it appear to have read the memorandum which we had so carefully prepared and circulated. Nor, I must admit, did the deputation entirely refrain from all talking at once. The proceedings, in fact, were faintly farcical and fantastic, as they so often are when *Homo Sapiens* meets in any kind of committee; and the upshot—so far as George and I ever understood it—was that if and when the Ministry of Health held a public inquiry into the Town Planning Scheme for our district, Rooklington should be allowed to give its evidence again.

This, of course, was a right rather than a favour, and when I left Rooklington, nearly five years later—which was shortly before George's new house was requisitioned, so that he had to leave, too—this public inquiry still hadn't been held. In that period we had done more lobbying and letter-writing, with the very best intentions

towards our native land; and once, for a few days, it actually seemed that George had found a benevolent millionaire. But by the time this character appeared on the spot, the first row of bungalows had already sprung up; and though it was true that the builders had deposited no plans with the Splashcliff surveyors, so that technically or legally they could have been made to pull them down again, they knew, and we knew, that the Ministry of Health would never insist on so stringent an interpretation of the law. So the benevolent millionaire gave one look at this horrid outbreak, decided, not unnaturally, that he had been called in too late, and passed on his way.

And more bungalows and villas arose, and roads gashed the downs—though the farmer was still farming the land of which he had now become a leaseholder. And the big development syndicate got into financial difficulties, so that smaller syndicates more or less built what they chose. And another syndicate suddenly said that it was going to develop all the rest of our view, but in this case—having thus artificially raised its value—allowed itself to be bought out by the local water company, into whose catchment-area it had been proposing to discharge its drains. And a new station was opened on the now electrified railway line—a suburban-looking station in full sight of our upper windows—in the hope that this would encourage still more development on behalf of season-ticket holders between Rooklington and London. And over and over again I said to George: “There’s only one thing that can stop all this, and that’s another war.” Which was what eventually happened, with more bankruptcies, and the half-finished roads and roofless houses all left to moulder away; while the new station was closed and became an anti-aircraft post and the unsold villas and bungalows were crammed with troops.

Yes, this was the fate of lovely little Rooklington, and though it didn’t all happen at once, the process never really paused now, and every time we went down there some fresh threat or eyesore was waiting to greet us from one point of the compass or another. But there we were, and we weren’t going to move yet. And whatever I had said about the only thing that could stop it all, I still hoped and prayed that it would never come to pass. It mustn’t. It couldn’t. Even though England were throwing away its heritage, or even if this, in some mysterious way, were the only method of appeasing the

Furies, there *must* be enough intelligence somewhere to avoid the return of war.

But there wasn't.

I caught a ghastly cold at that Council meeting, fought it for a bit, and then had to retire to bed. Got up again to have lunch with Diana and Dot. Lunched two days later with little Dorothy, who insisted—which made me almost as uncomfortable as when Mary had taken me to the theatre—on paying the bill. Was she still engaged? Very much so. Anything else to report? Nothing; though of course she was going to be married in the end. We went on to see her image in another film, though her play was still going strong at the Haymarket, and parted with much politeness on both sides, and of course would be meeting again. Oh, by the way, my regards, or whatever was the right way to put it, to Douglas. She twinkled, and vanished, and I put in another little prayer for her, too.

A night out with the Milnes, which may again be dated for others by the fact that they took us to see Miss Grace Moore's image, and to hear her recorded top notes, in *One Night of Love*. An evening with my cousin Di and her husband, now settled, to my great satisfaction, in Chelsea, too. An outburst of half-term generosity on my own part—but the children haven't forgotten it, for always it pays ten times over to be generous without warning—in the shape of a family visit to *Blackbirds* at the Coliseum. And the beginning of Mary's mingled infatuation for *Hamlet* and John Gielgud, so that much of our private conversation took place now in quotations from that inexhaustible store.

Then—we're in the middle of November now—Diana went off to Paris, and mainly on business, though I'm glad to think that some pleasure was involved as well. A cousin accompanied her, which of course I ought really to have done myself; though it's true that I was still working hard at my stories, and that I did a good deal, in her absence, for the dogs. Furthermore, she was committing me to a good deal of expense, for the main object of her journey was an interview with a Comtesse who specialized in applying French polish to British girls. Or in other words, though I couldn't remember ever having done more than groan and change the subject, steps were now being taken for Mary to acquire this polish, too.

Not yet; but advance booking was very necessary, and Diana, at

any rate, had made up her own mind. So—or so she informed us—had Mary. She was to leave school next Easter, attend classes, perhaps, in the summer, and set off for Paris—probably accompanied by one or more colleagues from the same establishment—in the autumn of 1935. Why? Well, Diana thought it was a good idea, and I still couldn't say it wasn't, for I was still very far from sure. But I couldn't deny that if Mary learnt French—after two schools and a Gallic governess had failed to instil more than a few primitive elements—it would be quite a good thing. I couldn't—any more than the Government—foresee the future of Paris and the Entente Cordiale. I had no objection to being presented—even at some cost—with a well-dressed daughter full of cosmopolitan *savoir-faire*. And if I also felt that this sort of plan was verging on anachronism, then I quite agreed when Diana said that no child of ours must ever be able to look back and say that we'd dished its chances in life and spoilt all its fun. Again I may have wished that everything would stand still and let me think, instead of dashing past me and leaving me gasping for breath. But mothers, surely, knew what was best for daughters, and of course I had no alternative suggestion of my own. For as a matter of fact, I was still trying to formulate my opinion about having any children at all. And nobody else could be expected to wait for a father with a mind like that.

So Diana saw the Comtesse, and the Guitrys; and I had two Pokes on my bed again, and spent a lot of time going round the block. And then she was back, rather tired, but triumphant, and all went on as before. As a matter of fact, I was rather tired myself this autumn, and not very triumphant, though the output was still keeping up. That talent—and not always, I am afraid, that secret talent—for falling into bottomless depression over nothing that I could ever analyse or describe came bubbling up from Heaven alone knows where. In an access of self-conscious melancholy I seem suddenly to have decided that if I noted my condition from day to day—indeed, I went further than this for a while, and noted it for each morning, afternoon, and evening—the result would either warn me when to expect the next dip or might just conceivably stop the whole rise and fall. So some mystical symbols began appearing in my account-book, and continued to appear (if you can believe this) for nearly two years. As I never, in fact, looked back at them, and had forgotten all about them until I saw where they started just now, I can't really

say that they achieved any object whatever. On the whole, and so far as I can understand them to-day, I don't seem to have been nearly as incessantly unhappy as I thought I was. While the dates when I was apparently in the very depths of despair have left no memory to explain how this came about. Perhaps I was just being my own rather awkward age. And I'm pretty positive that I should have broken off much sooner, if only I hadn't been proving to some suspicious *alter ego* that I could still stick to even a stupid decision like this.

Not, of course, that there wasn't plenty to worry about, from now onwards, if one happened to belong to the European branch of the so-called human race.

At the end of November I switched over to *The Wedding* again. As usual, the mere process of lying on a shelf had precipitated, as it were, the more solid matter to the bottom, or had left a kind of froth at the top that I could now blow off. If I had put it away for another four months, I have no doubt that I should have found the same thing again; and so on until—in theory—its final essence was reduced to one quintessential word. However, the publishers wanted rather more than that, and if Mary were going to Paris—yes, and there was talk now of Anne going to a boarding-school—I couldn't wait for ever. So I cut, joined, planed, and sand-papered, to produce a novel of the normal length. And the weight was slightly lifted, for there can be no doubt that this sort of work engenders a sense of virtue with very little strain.

Plum, at Le Touquet, had just finished a novel, too, and began musing to me on his primeval typewriter. "Books:—Have you by any chance read the unfunniest book in the world, entitled [name omitted]? I bought the blasted thing because the reviews coupled it with mine . . . and I can't get through it. What these asses don't seem to realize is that any fool can write one humorous book—perhaps two—maybe three—but that it takes brains and resolution to go on doing it year after year, with short stories added.

"One's consolation is that these first novels of humour sell 453 copies and make the publisher resolve never to publish another. I had been writing fifteen years and had published twenty-one books before I topped the two thousand sale. Thank God the British public loathes humour until it is bludgeoned into buying it by the

realization that the fellow intends to go on like this for ever."

And so on, with comments on his other recent reading, and a postscript announcing that he had been re-reading me, too. I have kept very little of Plum's characteristic correspondence—for one couldn't keep everything then, and one can hardly keep anything now—but this sample managed to get into the account-book, and now I must try and get someone's permission to print it. It shows, I think, what many people forget. That success didn't come rushing at him, and that all that reached him in the end was the result of ceaseless hard work. That's why I say something else about Plum. Judge not that ye be not judged.

Diana's mother, with Diana generally in attendance, was now hot on the trail of houses in Gloucestershire; but her companion was back on December 15th, when little Dorothy and Douglas took us out to a play. As we were in a box, I presume and trust that they didn't pay for it. But it was very kind, when they would much rather have been alone together, and we even wound up with refreshments in Douglas's Chelsea flat. Any more news? Nothing definite; but they knew, somehow, that they were going to be married next year. I thought again of my own long engagement, and wondered if it had been good for me; and if I could have pressed a magic button, would probably have whisked them to the altar there and then. But of course I was only a privileged spectator; and the last thing that either of them wanted to hear was what had happened to their aged well-wisher eighteen years ago.

Yet another play. The children's school had launched out this Christmas into two public performances of a home-made pantomime at the Fortune Theatre. For charity, so I had to pay to get in. But I must say it was rather good. Anne had a comparatively small part, but Mary was a species of Dame, and as I sat there laughing I also speculated on how many weeks of their autumn term could have been dedicated to anything else. On the other hand, what more could they have learnt if it had been all work and no pantomime? Only, so far as I could remember and so far as I could elicit any details from my children, to go round the old treadmill again. For after twelve of course one can only teach oneself, though it is still possible to learn nothing if you try hard enough. I stopped laughing. I was realizing again that the whole scholastic racket was built on the fact that parents, in my class, were faced with the exhausting and

almost impossible alternative of keeping adolescents at home. I'm afraid my attention wandered—until a very small boy, in a white hussar's uniform, came on to the stage and executed so brilliant a tap-dance that I not only clapped loudly but even (for once in my life) shouted out "Bravo!" The parent next to me leant over and spoke. "Your little lad?" he asked. Good heavens, as if I couldn't appreciate other people's children, or as if my own daughters—for all their practice at the tap class—could ever have danced like that.

Then the term ended, and Christmas was here itself. Family celebrations in London. A Boxing Day visit, at Diana's bountiful expense, to the Drury Lane pantomime; though as a matter of fact we had all enjoyed the school pantomime more. And so, two days later, all down to Rooklington for a short fortnight in our other house. The symbols suggest that I was happy there, though I wasn't taking a holiday, and there were no special outings or treats. But we knew how to keep the rooms warm now, there were friends and relations all round us, and even the occupants of that new house across the road were found to be quite harmless and pleasant now that they were neighbours too. From the window where I worked, the view was still unchanged. The donkeys still brayed in the L-shaped field, till Diana went out and stuffed them with more bread. Bully and Charles were both in safe hands in London, but the dogs, of course, were with us; sleeping, playing, walking, eating, and then sleeping again.

So very good. So utterly reliant, as always, on the very little that we did for them. So pleased to go wherever we went. So un-reproachful when they had to be left alone. There they had been, all this year, through thick and thin, and ups and downs. Not really in the background, though there has been so little in their own lives to describe. They stood for security, and home-coming, and the gentle, warm affection of two ever-responsive tails. Topsy seven now. Victoria four. Topsy still sleek rather than fluffy; Victoria, for some reason, still awaiting the full florescence of her tufted, puppy ears. Neither, in fact, a show-dog; but for us there were much more important qualities than that. These dogs were ours, and we loved them. It was inconceivable, as it still is, that we could ever manage without them. Yet darling Topsy was now more than half-way through her simple, faithful life.

## CHAPTER IX

1935

WE had a full week at Rooklington still, at the beginning of 1935, with no more revelry yet. I dare say the children found it dull—though on one day the Southdown Harriers set off on the chase from our village—but Diana and I didn't. For us these were a few days in which we could turn round, as it were, before the new year got altogether out of hand. An illusion, no doubt, for even this quiet little time in the country was nibbling away at January. But Rooklington could be very peaceful and cosy, in the midst of its winter sleep.

I had finished revising *The Wedding*. I hurled myself into the short stories again—contriving, on this occasion, to write seven in two months. But I wasn't always at the desk, and Diana and I talked plans.

She had some ideas—all mine were needed for the monthly magazines—and spread them before me. The children, she had already decided, were to leave their London school—and my own early instructress—at the end of the approaching term. Mary was still due in Paris in the autumn. Anne had exhibited a marked, and to me inexplicable, eagerness to try a boarding-school. Very well, then; Splashcliff was full of boarding-schools, Diana had now entered into negotiations with one of them, and Anne was to go there in May. Moreover, if we let Church Street, and spent the summer term at Rooklington, she could join as a weekly boarder, and come home to us every week-end.

"I don't want to let Church Street," I said.

"You know," said Diana, "you've always wanted to have a real spring and summer in the country. Besides, it'll pay for Anne's school, and perhaps part of Paris, too."

I was torn in twain. It was quite true that I had reached the age of forty-two without ever spending more than a few days of May and June away from bricks and mortar; and that instinct as well as a good deal of reading had often suggested that this was rather a mistake. It was quite true that I anticipated something of a thrill



in seeing the whole process—primroses, buttercups, cowslips, and the hay-crop—unfolding itself continuously before my eyes. It was quite true, also, that the next stage of the children's education was going to let me in for a great deal of expense. But on the other hand, I wasn't at all sure that I wanted to cut myself off from London entirely. And I was quite certain—with every sensation of every dog in the manger—that I didn't want strange people at 107, Church Street, Chelsea, whether they paid for the privilege or not.

So Diana found me baffling and unreasonable, and full of objections which had nothing to do with the case. Or again she saw me slipping into that all too familiar mood where I said, "Well, let's sleep on it"; and then went and slept on the plot of a short story instead. I thought I'd got her once, when I said: "Look here, isn't Mary going to do *anything* between Easter and October?" But then Mary was far from strong at this phase, having made the mistake of imitating my own rapid growth; and I knew now what a term off would have done for me; and, besides, Diana was still talking—though nothing ever came of it—of those classes. Finally I suppose—or, if it comes to that, mechanically and inevitably—the author managed to suggest that he had thought things over and given his consent, while the author's wife was left to clinch things with the new headmistress, and to take all the trouble of dealing with house-agents in London. Though it was still my secret hope, I am afraid, that in the latter affair she would fail.

Yet I contributed rather a doubtful bit of economy myself. When we left Rooklington on January 8th, I emptied the Rover's radiator, removed its accumulator—which would now be in the charge (for a consideration) of a friendly chauffeur—covered it with a dust-sheet, and locked the garage doors. For the first time since the summer of 1924 I should be without a car in London, and a rather strange feeling, at first, it was going to be. There were regrets, of course, but there were also pleasures. I didn't have to worry about parking now, which was becoming an appalling problem. When we came back from a dinner-party it was true that I had to pay a taxi; but then I didn't have to walk home from my Chelsea garage in the rain. I didn't have to keep saying to myself: "Have I pumped the tires up? When did I last look at the batteries? Isn't it time the blasted thing was greased again?" I also escaped a good deal of hack-work in the way of fetching and carrying, for which I wasn't

always, perhaps, in the mood. And of course I was saving the Chelsea garage rent. But the Zoo suddenly seemed to be quite out of reach. If the dogs were to go to a park, they must be taken on an omnibus. And with every wish to be careful and even mean, I did spend a good deal on those taxis. Profit and loss, in other words, as is generally the case. I didn't realize, however, the inner reason underneath it all. It hadn't even occurred to me that this sudden shifting of responsibility was a sign of increasing strain.

On January 10th the Milnes gave another of their juvenile theatre-parties, in which they were kind enough to include me as well. On January 11th we gave a great Ball at Church Street, at which something like fifty young persons were present, and a real though necessarily small band was engaged. I took the floor myself on several occasions. I pressed refreshments on the other parents. I was exhausted and bewildered, and went upstairs to talk to the dogs once or twice. And Diana was the perfect hostess, as she always is.

On the next day Annè was thirteen; and as it was also a Saturday, I took my family out to lunch in the West End, and on to a matinée of Alan Herbert's revue, *Streamline*, at the Palace Theatre, which we all enjoyed very much indeed. And on the Sunday evening I set out again with Mary for our first visit to the new Gaumont Cinema in Chelsea. The interesting thing for me, of course, was that it had been built—as I said before—on the site of that row of little shops where Diana had first seen Topsy; though for some reason there had been a long gap in time between their demolition and the completion of this new, vast building. Here it was, though, and I was sitting in it, thinking of Topsy. And wondering, as we came out again and passed another set of posters, how long, in these new circumstances, the Chelsea Palace could survive. I wished it well, though; and I needn't have worried, for the management didn't take things lying down. They cheapened their seats—though they also put in some new ones which were rather narrower and closer together—and continued to fly the flag of twice-nightly variety and so-called revue. And we still went there, whenever a poster tempted me, and still, far oftener than not, got full value for our money. Or if we didn't, could be home in five minutes, with no sense of resentment against anything so cheap. It seemed also, I am glad to say, that I wasn't the only person who liked shabby scenery, good old

jokes, and magic-lantern advertisements in the interval. For whatever was happening at the Gaumont Cinema, its cosier and more old-fashioned neighbour was still, almost invariably, crammed. Vulgar? Oh, yes, every now and then. But vital, and English, and very much alike and kicking, too.

Then the children started their last London term—or so we still supposed—and two nights later, on another Saturday, Diana's mother took us all to a revival of *The Bing Boys Are Here*, at the Alhambra. She had taken two of us here nineteen years ago, for my long engagement was often alleviated by this sort of kindness and generosity, and I had bought the sheet music and played it indefatigably on the piano. So what was I going to feel this evening? Well, there was a wonderful audience, and two of the original stars were still there on the stage, with very little sign of change. But the seats had suffered the same process as at the Chelsea Palace; a false proscenium arch, shaped like a whale's jaw-bone, now hid the original Moorish design—a film season had been responsible for this, too; and I found that I remembered far too much of the original production to be content with its more economical successor. Where were those big bells from which girls had descended at the end of the first part? Where, in fact, were all the old spacious and gaudy sets? Where were the Gresham Singers, with their strange but, as it now seemed, essential interpolation of glees? All gone; and this audience didn't appear to miss them, and Robey was still remarkably funny, and my children were convulsed with mirth. But Diana's engagement-book speaks for both of us when it adds the statement: "All rather sad." We didn't want air-raid warnings, or the noisy chatter from uniforms in the old promenade. But nineteen years hadn't spared the once fabulous Bing Boys. We would have been content, perhaps, to go back only half that way. But we couldn't.

Another night out—but it was at a new musical play, and we weren't expecting so much—with our dear and decorative Dot. A fall of snow, which started all my doubts again about spring in the country, but which Victoria appreciated to the full. And another dinner at Church Street—including Dot again, and the Leslie Bankses—at which all the guests knew each other so well that the host, at any rate, began wondering if he knew them at all. Jealous? Oh, dear, no. Taking his ease with a great deal of quiet pleasure. Yet just speculating occasionally on how soon it would be noticed

if he slipped out with his dogs round the block. Or in other words, though I say it myself, a very successful evening.

February. A sprinkling of characters was arriving now to look over the house. Suddenly, as I sat working, the door would be opened and one or more strangers would be ushered in. "I hope," they would say, "I'm not disturbing you." "Oh, no," I would reply, springing to my feet; "not in the least." If I weren't careful, I was then apt to find myself telling them what a wonderfully well-planned and convenient house it was; pride, at the moment, or some vague instinct for salesmanship, being apparently stronger than a very genuine desire that they would never come back. The door closed, as I gave another charming smile; and then—oh, gosh, if people only *knew* what happened when they came into an author's room. Half an hour perhaps, an hour, the whole of the rest of the morning, before, like an angry spider, I could piece my broken web together. And I am afraid I gave no encouragement to any intruder who returned.

Nevertheless, intruders did return, and presently an agent whom Diana had selected was making us a vicarious offer. Admirable clients, he said. Preferred living in furnished houses for some reason (and that ought to have warned me), but were well-known people of title. I'd never heard of them. Wait a second, though. There was a faint tinkle in the back of my brain. The name did twang a distant chord. I communicated with an encyclopædic friend, and he produced the dossier. I knew the name because my would-be tenant had spent some months in prison after a rather disgusting case of drunken assault; and though technically he had expiated this offence and shouldn't be branded as an outlaw, I didn't see why I should encourage him to live in my house. Being highly nervous of actions for slander and libel, I gave no reason to the agent, but I'm bound to say that neither he nor his client showed any surprise. I used to see the client popping in and out of public-houses for quite a while after this, for it seemed that he was established somewhere in the neighbourhood. But I never knew whether he were cutting me or were unable to focus his eyes on me; poor chap. In any case, we still hadn't got a tenant, and I felt a considerable sense of reprieve. Though our house was still, as the saying goes, in the agents' hands.

Meanwhile, as a result of having written to Alan Herbert to tell him how much we had enjoyed *Streamline*, Diana and I had

received a kind and cordial invitation to see it again. So off we went to our free seats, and presently Alan himself turned up, and was remarkably hospitable in his generous, friendly way. In fact, we didn't see very much of the revue after that, for first he took us to the bar and introduced us to the staff there; then it was the interval, and he introduced us to some of the band; and then, so far as I can remember, we were up in the flies, which was fascinating and romantic enough, but from where there was a poor and considerably foreshortened view of the actual entertainment. Alan seemed as popular here as elsewhere—he told us, by the way, that the flymen were nearly all old sailors, which of course provided him with a special link; and then he was introducing us—somewhere on the stairs—to La Jana.

Do you remember her? She did a slow, sinuous Spanish dance on a little platform, wearing very few clothes, and removing most of what she did wear just before the curtain fell. On the stairs, of course, she was fully attired in a wrapper. It was clearly my duty to compliment her on her turn.

I did so; adding, however—from some unnecessary notion of honesty—that I had never been in Spain.

"Ah," she said, in a strong foreign accent; "but my dance—eet ces Spain sterilised."

I was surprised, though I trust I didn't show it. I wondered, naturally, what the unsterilized version would have been like; but as Alan had already told me that she could hardly speak English at all, it seemed useless to try and discuss this. I smiled. I withdrew. In fact, we were all going down the stairs again, when suddenly she came pattering after us.

"I make a mistake," she announced. "Not 'sterilised.' Stylised!"

The conscientious creature then rushed away and vanished from my life. I read in a newspaper, about five years later, that the German authorities had sent her into Poland, "for propaganda purposes," and that somehow this had led to pneumonia, and the end. I felt sad, even in the midst of other sadness, for though it now appeared that she had been a German herself, and had thus become one of my enemies, she certainly made me laugh, on those backstage stairs of the Palace Theatre, in February, 1935.

Our queer evening concluded at Kettner's Restaurant, just round the corner, where Alan insisted on standing us supper. He also

brought with him a selection of Mr. Cochran's young ladies—nice, quiet girls, I thought, though one of them did provide me with a bit of a snub. I never caught her name, but she was addressed—though not by me—as Baby; and she was sitting next to me, and was a little silent, and I tried talking to her about films. I mentioned one that I had just seen—it was rather the rage at the moment—and for a second it almost seemed that I had roused her from her reverie.

"Did you like it?" she asked. "Was it good?"

"Well," I said, with another access of honesty, "I'm afraid I didn't think it so very hot."

She shrank back. She looked appalled.

"'Not so very hot'?" she repeated. "But that's the sort of thing *we* say. *You* oughtn't to talk like that."

I felt painfully humbled, as she instantly relapsed into her previous state of meditation. I still think that the expression, however colloquial, was ordinary and harmless enough. Was it possible that Baby had ideals about authors? That she was pulling my leg? That alone, of all Mr. Cochran's young ladies, she was conscious of a gulf between the stage and the stalls? I shall never know. Having put me in my place, she returned to her own, and I never saw her or *Streamline* again. A good show, though, and a very amusing evening. I approved and still approve Alan Herbert's method of acknowledging a short letter of congratulation. But as a mere novelist and story-writer now, I could of course do nothing in return.

February 13th. "Haven't felt well for about a week, and have been gummed up in work." February 16th. "Didn't do any work at all." Signs of strain again. Also, perhaps, another expression that Baby wouldn't have passed. But the strain was there, in spite of a gay night out, and in spite of another Valentine from Mary—again distinctly pagan and daring in tone. Of course I was working too hard, but of course I still suspected idleness, so that if I were gummed up one week, I had to work twice as hard the next. Diana said: "Knock off on Saturdays," and pointed out that people of my age who were in the City nearly all and always did this. I tried it once—for the 16th was a Saturday—but my remorse was dreadful, and the effort on Monday, as I had known it would be, was enormously increased. Besides, those people of my age in the City were being paid whether they worked or not. And I wasn't. So I must go on

writing; not only because of the overhead, and because I had trained myself to write, but because still and always I was hoping to write better than before. The glimpses of perfection still showed themselves, and I pounded after them. I combined, in some unfortunate manner, a profound reluctance to let anyone know what I was thinking with a ceaseless urge to express myself in ink. There was a daily battle, therefore, even when things were apparently going smoothly. But it turned into a horrible sort of *mêlée* when I was fighting fatigue as well.

I look at another old notebook. Four short stories in this month of February. All light and funny. All found fit for publication. And I didn't crack for a long time yet. But of course I was asking for it, and if the symbols were showing an almost constant state of depression, the mind that studies them now can hardly feel surprised. It was all my own private trouble, though, that I had devised entirely for myself. If I wouldn't come to my own senses, nobody else could save me.

We went down to Frank Hopwood's in Kent—Audrey being abroad at the moment—for a cheerful Sunday. We went, at Dot's invitation, to the dress-rehearsal of another revue—*Stop Press*—in which she was starring, and looking younger than ever. Little Dorothy came to dinner, and took us on to see Douglas in *Theatre Royal*; where we left her eventually, for she was still very firmly, though now much less confidentially, engaged. And now—with February fading into March, with both children ill in bed again, and with a new novel taking the place of the short stories—another house-agent suddenly produced another client.

Again I rose and smiled at her. Again, if only I had made a few more inquiries, I should have discovered that she was almost as unsuitable as a client or tenant could be. But I didn't. I trusted her written references—after all, why not?—and she reappeared, and made an offer to take 107, Church Street, from the end of this month until the beginning of September at the rent that Diana had asked. I accepted it. I didn't want to accept it, because I hadn't the least wish to leave London now, and because I hated the thought of strangers in my home. But I recognised, also, that there were limits to this kind of weak-mindedness, and the plans went ahead. Diana began tidying, sorting, packing, and arranging. I did a good deal of

arranging myself. The children were still ill. And in the middle of this same exhausting month—which was marked also by the re-introduction of conscription in Germany, and the decision of the British and French Governments to look the other way—my father-in-law was taken seriously ill, too. So Diana must rush over to Kensington every day, not only to comfort both parents but to help in the preliminary stages of preparing their new house in Gloucestershire. While someone—and of course it was Diana again—must dash down to Rooklington to make more plans for our own move there. What a month! And what else was the author up to?

Well, he did support his own end, I think, when he wasn't actually working. But the new novel was important if only as a method of bread-winning, and the glimpse having come and gone again, I was groaning and struggling at my desk. The scenario dealt with a hero who was to have retired from an overseas post and to return now as a student of his brother's family and the contemporary English scene. An early romance of his own was to be revived, but in the end he was to realize that he had left things too late, and having completed his studies—with a good deal of help for the other characters—he was to embark quietly on another liner and slip, gladly enough, into the old rut. Title, *Back Again*. Hero's age, forty-seven; which still, I suppose, seemed old to me, but in any case I didn't want him to be a dodderer, and I had fixed things so that it was quite in order for him to try and retire. As for the treatment, there was to be a brief prologue, and a still briefer epilogue; but the bulk of the story was to be told in his own words. Taken from a rather formless, imaginary diary, and this meant that I was risking the first person singular, which I knew well enough was a very considerable snare. I had used it occasionally in short stories, though the first person had hardly ever been the hero. And I had actually used it once for a complete novel, or at any rate for three-quarters of it; until the point where it had suddenly sickened me, and I had gone right back to the beginning and re-written the whole thing in the third person instead. So that I was nervous this time, though I still couldn't see how to tell my story in any other way. And I wrote furiously—and tore up madly—in my great anxiety to get the first person so firmly established that he couldn't be anything else. And all the while I must see the inventory-man, and talk to the house-agent, and stand up when our tenant came for another look round, and write letters about insurance, and



the telephone, and the gas, and the water, and the electricity. So that Diana and I were both very busy indeed.

A farewell evening with J. M. B., now talking about his new play, but still with much mystery and reserve. And then, on March 27th, which was the day on which our tenant with her family and staff were to arrive, I hired a large car—mostly for the luggage and the pets—and by this means, and by various trains from Victoria, the great hegira was made. We couldn't take the goldfish, because there was no pond at Rooklington—and we never made one, because I was afraid of seagulls—but I left a supply of their special food, and minute, written instructions; and these at least, I am thankful to say, were obeyed. One very good mark for the tenant, therefore, to set against all the black ones that would soon begin piling up. And here we were in the country, and must stay for a solid six months. It was bitterly cold. There was a sea-fog, through which came the constant and maddening note of a coastal fog-horn. And Diana had to spend the whole of Mary's sixteenth birthday in bed.

Grey skies, east winds, and frosts, day after day. The natives said they had never known such an April, and I didn't like to tell them that it was entirely due to my having let my London house. But I was still working frantically, and quite at the beginning of the month there was a very good reason why the symbols suddenly, if temporarily, improved. Little Dorothy came to stay with us again. Her latest play—the dress-rehearsal of which we had also attended—had run only a few nights. But she was smiling, for her engagement had now been publicly announced, and she was to be married, so she told us, within a matter of weeks rather than months. My romantic nature was delighted. I looked the other way when she opened those thick envelopes which still arrived by every post. I hid upstairs when she was telephoning in the hall. We all discussed the wedding again and again. And then suddenly—yes, this was the compliment that I have had such difficulty all this time in keeping to myself—she asked me if I would give her away.

Or did I suggest it? I might have, you know. Laughingly, of course, for all my eagerness to play this great rôle. But if I did suggest it—and this is something that neither of us can remember now—then she certainly suggested it, too. And of course I didn't hesitate for a moment. I would give her away, without any question, at any place or time that she cared to choose. She twinkled. I dare say her

own long engagement seemed suddenly to be closing up like a concertina, and though I was still working like a demon, we all had a very happy four days.

At the end of them Douglas reappeared, and took her away; though as he was playing in Brighton during the following week, we hadn't really lost sight of either of them. It seemed, also, that he, too, was now reconciled to my rôle. I began thinking about my clothes, for still, when necessary, I was using my own original wedding garments, which were now eighteen years old. This wouldn't do for little Dorothy. Not nearly good enough. I must go up to London, as soon as I had a spare moment, and see what could be contrived.

Meanwhile, the bride's mother paid us a visit. She was having last-minute nerves, for which I didn't blame her—and shouldn't have blamed her, even if Douglas had been heir to the throne—and I, it seemed, must appear wise and omniscient (which of course I wasn't), and must reassure her on grounds which I couldn't help realizing, just every now and then, were chiefly a matter of my own enthusiasm for romance. Yet if people were young and loved each other, why shouldn't they marry? Dot and I went for a long walk on the downs together, with the intention of thrashing everything out. But we never did. We began telling each other stories, and laughing. And whenever Dot looked anxious, I'm afraid I thought of nothing but how I could make her laugh again. I was on everyone's side in this business, and it shows their remarkable quality that they all knew this and none of them seemed to mind. But who was I, anyhow, to offer a mother advice? Nobody. Or only an old and affectionate friend. Yet of course the mother in this case was incurably romantic, too.

So we settled nothing or everything. Dot, in any event, seemed much happier when she left—bless her heart—though I think she carried away rather an inaccurate notion of the kind of country life that we led. For on the Saturday of her short visit, as chance would have it, no less than eight unexpected guests arrived for tea, and three of them—though imported by another guest, and complete strangers to Diana and me—were exiled members of a foreign royal family. Perhaps you would like to know what they did. Well, they all pounced on a big jig-saw puzzle that I had just started, and never left it until they had put in the last piece. Was I gratified? Well, yes, in a way. For as a host I certainly seemed to have solved a con-

siderable problem in hospitality and etiquette. But of course I *had* been rather looking forward to doing the puzzle myself.

By this Easter, which was late but still frightfully cold, the Darlington's were well installed in the Hugheses' old house in the village, while the Hugheses' new house—which was visible from our windows, but was anything but a blot on the landscape—was either finished or nearly complete. Both families remained Londoners as well, and the Mackails were only temporary exiles. But often, henceforth, we would all be down at Rooklington together, and when that happened both generations would be constantly in and out of each other's gardens and homes. The Rooklington Set, that suited us so well, and is all broken up now. How often I must have taken my depression round to one of these good neighbours, and then suddenly have discovered that we were all laughing again.

At the end of April Anne and I were left alone together—though of course we had the dogs, and Charles, and Bully—while Mary went off to friends in Yorkshire, and Diana supported her mother through the move into the new Gloucestershire house. Victoria slept on my bed, of course; but the gentle Topsy passed the nights with Anne. For quietly, persistently, and then, as it seemed, almost with a rush, the gentle Topsy had now so far enlarged her devotion that my younger daughter ranked almost as high as my wife. Curious. For Topsy and Anne had been living under the same roof for well over seven years before this sudden affection developed. Yet from this point, even when Diana was at home, our little head dog would insist, when she had been called and let out in the morning, on returning not to the bed where she had just passed the night, but to Anne's bed instead. Or if Anne summoned her, later in the day, she came at once; which means a very great deal in the case of a Pekie. I just can't account for it, since Anne had paid no special court to her; unless it were that somehow she already knew about the boarding-school, and—again like all Pekes—always wanted everybody to stay at home. In any case, Anne was obviously flattered, even though she didn't always wake up when Topsy bounded on to her bed, and the devotion, from now onwards, was amply returned. There was no jealousy from the heads of the household, for Topsy's heart had only grown larger, and we were both still her very closest friends.

Diana broke the journey back from Gloucestershire in order to buy still more items for the lavish outfit which the boarding-school

demanded, and then she joined us again. We paid a chilly visit to the Milnes and Hopwoods. The Hopwoods paid a chilly visit to us—though the adjective in all these cases refers to nothing but the weather. And then, quite suddenly, there was one gloriously fine and warm day. May 6th. The Jubilee. It must now also be confessed, and perhaps should have been sooner, that the Jubilee was one of the real reasons why I had consented to leave London. Not that I was lacking in loyalty to Royalty—though I had, it is true, been brought up in an era when a jubilee still meant the Levitical fifty years—but I had always had a horror of crowds, and knew that Diana (who loves them) would try to drag me into them. However, there was no crowd at Rooklington. We stuck some flags out of our windows, I did my ordinary morning's work, and in the afternoon there were again some very simple sports on the grassy slope by the church. It was, in fact, exactly like the Produce Show—except that there was no Produce; and that as Splashcliff was having its own festivities, in which we had been too proud to join, there was no incursion of revellers from even two and a half miles away. The Vicar presented me with a red-white-and-blue pencil; though it's true again that I had contributed rather more than its value to the expenses of the occasion. Anne, ranking temporarily as one of the village schoolchildren, was given a Jubilee mug. The farmer again won the high jump. And then it was all over, so far as Rooklington was concerned; except for the bonfires, which presently began glowing on the tops of the downs. The symbols disclose considerable happiness, for though I couldn't help thinking of the Diamond Jubilee, which in turn must remind me that I was nearly forty-three, I had deeply appreciated my pencil, and everything else.

Two days later Anne went off, very cheerfully, to her new school, with a trunk full of her new clothes. She was still so near that but for the hill in between we could easily have seen her windows. And she would be back again for the night on Saturday, so that for all of us it might have been very much worse. Nor was she the least disappointed with any of the experiences to which she had so unaccountably looked forward. In fact, it was a very nice school indeed, and the other girls must have liked her, or surely they wouldn't have called her "Plonkie." It wasn't their fault, and perhaps not even the school's, that it all turned into another bit of ill-fortune in the end.

On the next morning Diana and I went up to London by train.

We both shopped—my own shopping being of course connected with little Dorothy's approaching wedding. In the evening we went to a very dull play together—not that we had meant it to be dull—and then we came out, and walked about in the flood-lit streets, where Diana still wanted to plunge into the thickest crowds, and I still endeavoured to pull her back. Very beautiful and strange, with no vehicular traffic at all here, but just people, and lighted buildings, and the elaborately decorated streets. Perhaps it was because of this strangeness that I felt no customary instinct to conclude the evening by driving back to Chelsea. But of course I couldn't have done this anyhow, for our tenants were still installed there—having already broken the refrigerator, and being quite prepared to break a lot more. So Diana went off to her parents' deserted house in Kensington. And I had one of my very rare nights at a Club. Unfortunately, in a sense, it had been flood-lit, too, and as one of the big lamps was on a parapet just outside my window, and as the crowds were still churning about, with a good deal of innocent merriment, in the streets below, I can't say that I had a very good night. But I had a very good breakfast, and I had ordered my new wedding garments, and with these two achievements to my credit I returned once more to my country home.

"Colder and colder," says Diana's record. "Frost spoiling potatoes and fruit." And then, as late as May 19th: "Still very cold." But it was a little milder on the next day, or the eve of the wedding, when three of us—but Anne would be coming up with our parlourmaid for the day to-morrow—caught the train again for London. We were all very much excited, and if my work were to be sacrificed anyhow—and of course it had got to be, if I were giving a bride away—then we were all going to start with a night out. So we dined at the Savoy Grill, and we went on to see *1066 and All That* at the Strand Theatre. And then we called on the bride's mother, in her dressing-room at the Adelphi. And not until we had done all this did we drive back to Kensington, where—again through the courtesy of Diana's absent parents—we were all to spend the night.

Then it was the great day. I shaved with exquisite care. I watched the clock. I began dressing, for the second time, very thoroughly and slowly. Almost the whole visible outfit was brand-new. My trousers were superbly striped. My morning-coat fitted me to perfection. A pale-grey, backless waistcoat adorned the front of my manly

form. My tie was a poem. My shoes glittered. I had a gardenia in my buttonhole, a grey top-hat, and even a pair of yellow gloves. No, it wasn't raining—"Happy the bride that the sun shines on"—but I felt a curious reluctance to leaving the house. In a couple of hours or so I should only be one of many in this gorgeous array, but in Kensington, at about a quarter to one, I confess that I was feeling just a little conspicuous.

However, I had the pluck to go out for a taxi myself—thereby perhaps saving as much as sixpence—and I found one, and I got into it (though cautiously, because of my hat), and I told it to take me to the Milnes' house in Mallord Street, for the Milnes had very kindly offered to give me lunch. I could see that my appearance impressed them enormously, but I was still rather nervous and ill at ease. Moreover, this was the first time that I had passed my own house in Church Street since strangers had begun living there, and that vision had rather disturbed me, too. But the Milnes were kind, as they always are, and presently—after innumerable glances at my watch—I left them, for the time being, and proceeded delicately along the King's Road until I came to the corner of Glebe Place. For it was here, at Mrs. Syrie Maugham's, that I was to meet and pick up the Bride.

There was a small crowd outside the door already, but of course, though at the moment I was well worth seeing, they hadn't come to see me. I was admitted to a large, empty room. I quaked, both personally and on behalf of everyone else. A strange bridesmaid appeared, darted a look of terror at me, and vanished. Dot appeared; ridiculously young and quite lovely; and complimented me on my clothes. I felt a little calmer, and she certainly seemed calm enough herself, though I knew quite well that she wasn't. Then the C. B. Cochrans appeared, and I have a faint notion that we conversed. And then, at last, the inner door opened, and there was little Dorothy herself; all in white, and with a veil; and my past life came rushing before me, and I couldn't think of a dashed thing to say.

So I said "Hullo." And little Dorothy smiled, and said "Hullo" to me. We all looked at the clock again, and Dot told me that on no account must I reach the church too soon. I gave her my solemn oath, and then she and the Cochrans and the rest of the misty and vaguely-remembered gathering of bridesmaids and supporters all left by the door in Glebe Place.

Little Dorothy obviously couldn't sit down, because of her dress. And I couldn't sit down, because of little Dorothy. So we waited, rather silently, and both looking at the clock, until suddenly I said: "Come on. I think we ought to go."

The crowd outside had now become considerably larger, and as we stepped on to the pavement a Press photographer snapped his camera at us, and then asked me who I was. I tried hard to remember. I succeeded. I told him. And then, with the help of a policeman and a manservant, I followed little Dorothy into a vast Rolls-Royce, which had been placed at her disposal by one of Douglas's relations. It turned into the King's Road. And in another moment it had turned into the lower part of Church Street, at the river end of which was Chelsea Old Church.

It was about ten seconds later that I realized how utterly superfluous Dot's instructions had been. For the narrow street was crammed with spectators, the car moved more and more slowly, and presently women were jumping on both running-boards, putting their heads through the windows, and either loudly commenting on my companion's beauty or offering her their congratulations and good wishes. She smiled very sweetly at them, and I, of course, did nothing at all. The car stopped altogether. There was a surge of policemen, and it moved forward. More men—dozens of them—with cameras. I looked at my watch. I was horrified, for the last few yards had taken almost as many minutes, and already we were disgracefully late.

But we were getting out. There were the bridesmaids. And here was my right arm. I learnt afterwards that a false alarm of our approach had resulted in the choir singing the first hymn while we were still actually fending off the enthusiasts, and that there had then been rather an awkward pause. But here we were at last, and it started gallantly again. "Wait!" said a figure in a cassock. "Now, then!" he said. And off we went.

I kept a straight course. I didn't trip up. And little Dorothy still had my arm. I caught a glimpse of my family. I saw Douglas, looking pale but determined—I think he had been standing there for quite twenty minutes—and his brother, equally well-dressed, who was his Best Man. Thus we arrived at the point where little Dorothy gently detached herself, and I must await the critical moment at which I should be asked a question to which I wasn't allowed to reply.

It came. I bowed my acknowledgment, and did my best to step back into the end of the top, left-hand pew. Unluckily Dot's emotion, or pressure from the other direction, had resulted in there being exactly six inches to spare; so that for the rest of the ceremony, whether I were standing, kneeling, or attempting to sit, at least two-thirds of me were still out in the aisle. However, I couldn't possibly have had a better view.

Presently the bridal couple were summoned up to the altar, where they listened to an address of such a confidential nature that no syllable of it reached even myself. Perhaps they heard it. Perhaps, for once I had played a still more important part in a much earlier production, they were as little conscious of their surroundings as I was then. But eventually there was a subtle change in the silence. A blessing was pronounced. The organ burst forth again. And Dot invited me to accompany her into the vestry.

Here I am under the distinct impression that I signed the register. Also that I croaked a few words, for I was very much moved. Ten and a half years since I had first known this child or bride; and now she was married, and I—though she wasn't mine—had given her away. I wondered, foolishly, but with some natural qualms, if this were the end now. I also wondered—since I was an author even in the vestry—if I had made any mistakes in my novel, *The Wedding*; though as I had passed the final proofs now, this thought came rather late. But no; the memories on which it had been built had all been confirmed by my experiences just now. Good. And now, as in my novel, the organ was playing the Wedding March, and we must all somehow manage to get out of the church.

It was a job. The whole, wide embankment was by this time blocked with spectators, and though the reception was to be held at a house only a few yards along it, Diana and I and the children had a hard fight to get there. Yet presently I was under a second striped awning. And then I was yielding up my carefully-guarded gloves and hat. And then I was in a large room—which once, so I was told, had been Whistler's studio—and a large seneschal was bawling all our names.

I shook hands with the bride and bridegroom, who gratified me enormously by appearing to know me. And then I was merged in the crowd. Now, I thought, my duties are over. All I have to do now is to sip champagne, to greet my friends, and to reflect on the



good fortune which has enabled me to play a leading rôle in this interesting affair with all the fun and none of the responsibility. A weight, which, of course, I need never have felt, was suddenly lifted. And I was just raising a bumper to my lips, when Douglas's brother suddenly tapped me on the shoulder.

"Look here," he said; "we want you to propose their healths. With a little speech, you know."

"*Me?*" I said, all but dashing my glass on the parquet.

"Yes," he said.

"When?" I asked, trembling like an aspen-leaf.

"Now," he said.

"But I say——"

He'd gone. He was speaking to the seneschal. The seneschal began bawling so loudly that every other voice was stilled.

"My lords, ladies, and gentlemen! Pray silence for Mr. Denis Mackail!"

Well, they told me, afterwards, that there was hardly a pause. I am quite unable to recall the little speech myself, but it seems that I delivered it, and certainly my heart was full. Certainly, if it comes to that, my audience was anything but critical. Words came from somewhere, and they were sincere, for never had I wished a bride and bridegroom to be happier or more fortunate than these. I can just remember one thing; that in the midst of it all I was haunted by some superstitious terror, so that I very nearly broke off to explain that I wasn't really challenging the Fates. But luckily my brief though silver-tongued oration had too much impetus to allow of interruption even from myself. I raised my glass again. There was considerable applause, though I am not claiming that any of it was for me. And thus we all drank to little Dorothy and Douglas; and poor Douglas turned pink, and thanked us.

The big room was crammed. I was buffeted to and fro. I shouted at my friends and relations, but of course they never heard me. A high window suddenly opened, and we were all being filmed, it seemed, by a camera perched outside. There was a temporary lull. There was an immense recrudescence of the original uproar. Somehow—yes, I distinctly remember this—I was upstairs in somebody's bedroom, where Douglas, with the assistance and interference of several other adherents, was changing into less formal attire. And then I was on the stairs again, where I suddenly met Dot. We

embraced, without comment, and I have often wondered since then if she thought I was drunk. But I wasn't. And perhaps, on the other hand, this was part of my duty also; though I shan't say it was an effort. Dear Dot, you were something more than a heroine that day yourself.

I was in the hall again. I was being pushed out into the street—where I recognized our parlourmaid in the forefront of the throng. But I forced my way back, and this time so successfully that I was carried right through into the studio. It was for this reason that I never actually saw the Bride again; until, after a third and mighty struggle, I burst forth into the roadway, and just caught a glimpse of one arm waving over the back of a big, two-seater car. It grew smaller and smaller. It vanished. It was going, as I knew, to Paris and all sorts of places, and we shouldn't be seeing either Douglas or little Dorothy again until they had been to America as well. Though, bless them, they did send me a very touching telegram from Folkestone.

All over. And a complete blank in my memory for the whole of the rest of the day. I know, of course, that Anne and the parlourmaid went back to Sussex. That Diana and Mary went on to the new house in Gloucestershire. And that three days later—I, meanwhile, having remained in a rather dazed condition in London—we all three met at Victoria, and returned to our deserted dogs. Who forgave us, and were quite well and safe; for we had a very reliable dog-loving housemaid at this epoch, and they had been with her all the time.

There was something, however, that nobody knew. That within less than six years from this happiest of weddings the exquisite little church would have been utterly destroyed, the house where the party was held would be wrecked and shattered, the Best Man—with a pretty wife of his own now—would be a prisoner of war in Germany, the Bridegroom would be overseas in the Fleet Air Arm, and the Bride—herself working like a heroine, too—would have nothing but memories of a home. No, it wasn't my speech that would have achieved all this. It was the incredible blindness and folly of men who considered themselves fit to lead others.

It must have been years since I had taken four days' holiday as boldly as this, and though with more sense I might have extended

it further, I flung myself back into the new novel at once. There would be more guests, also—mostly friends of Mary's—as the summer wore on; though still it would be the best part of a month before I could record another really fine or warm day. On my forty-third birthday I seem merely to have noted that sixpence fell out of my pocket, and that somebody whom I now can't remember at all came in for a cocktail. Yet the symbols show that I thought myself happy, and if I had wanted more elaborate celebrations, of course I should have had them. But I didn't. I wanted to get on with my work.

On our eighteenth wedding-day, in the middle of June, we went to a pageant at Anne's school, shivered on seats in the garden, inspected the premises, and brought her back—since it was a Saturday—for the night. Then Diana and Mary paid another short visit to Gloucestershire, and I accompanied them as far as London, where, after a long interval, I suddenly returned to the Zoo; for the sole but satisfactory purpose of looking at Jubilee, the baby chimpanzee. Such a mob was besieging her residence that first I had to stand in a queue, and then, but for my height, I doubt if I should have seen anything at all. A proud keeper stood there with an air of paternity. The real parent was, I must admit, remarkably plain. But poor little Jubilee—who roused such fury among certain people who said that she was having more care than thousands of human babies—was in my opinion well worth the trip to town. As I was forced out of the little building, I immediately joined the tail of the queue again. It was a strange nursery, and I hesitated to think what my own complexes would be if I had been brought up before a crowd of staring apes. Yet I had to forgive the Zoo this time, in spite of my strengthening principles. And I knew I should be seeing a lot more of Jubilee as soon as I could.

Then came the real fine weather at last. Then came a second entertainment—a "Fête" this time—at Anne's school. And then, at the very end of the month, I was able, after a final and desperate spurt, to chronicle the completion of the first draft of *Back Again*; "with which," I added, "I am thoroughly discontented, and with reason." Hardly a real sense of relief, therefore; though when I showed it to Diana, she gave me all the praise I wanted; and when I read it myself the other day, I really thought it was rather good. So perhaps I improved it when I polished it, in the following

November. Or perhaps—though I certainly oughtn't to count on this—Diana's eulogies weren't entirely due to loyalty. It is even possible that my own belated opinion was justified here and there. But at the moment I was very tired, I took a very black view of the whole business; and I immediately began writing short stories again. For again my real holiday must wait until August, and still it was only July.

Much easier, however, to be reconciled to the country now, with warm days, with bathing again, and with as yet no inrush of the other holiday-makers who would presently be crowding the beach, picnicking, with much waste paper, on the bank outside our house, leaving the farmer's gates open, and trying to feed the donkeys with pages of the *Daily Mirror*. It was for this last reason that we now planted a hedge along the low flint wall that abutted on the road; though we then had to put up a wire fence as well, so that the donkeys shouldn't eat it. It grew quickly, and was rather a fine sight by the time we left.

Up to London again, for another night. Still not at Church Street, where there was some trouble now about a noisy party, which hadn't only upset the neighbours, but had called for repairs to the drawing-room door. Our own destination was another and much more respectable party, at the Nico Llewelyn Davieses', on Campden Hill. And we slept, or rather tossed and turned in suffocating heat, at the Royal Palace Hotel. Back to Rooklington by a midday train, and in the afternoon a welcome visit from Plum and Leonora; he being her guest at the moment near Tonbridge. Plum immediately resumed our discussion of literature, which had been interrupted more than a year ago; appeared to take very little notice of either the house or garden; and at some mystical moment was seized with impatience to get away. He couldn't just vanish into thin air this time, because Leonora had brought him in her car. Yet the visit terminated very abruptly; and we laughed, and smiled, and were glad that he hadn't changed.

Another fortnight of working and bathing, and then Anne's school broke up, and I fetched her home. Two children, or at any rate two daughters, under the same roof again. But only for one night. For in the morning we all caught the London train again, and while three of us went to a matinée—*Anything Goes*—Mary and her favourite school-friend set off, with the favourite school-

friend's kind mother, on the long journey to Kitzbühel, in the Austrian Tyrol. Funds for Mary's expenses supplied by her parents, but it was a well-planned and not at all extravagant three weeks. She would return with a passion for Austria and the Austrians which we rather hoped might be transferred, when the time came along, to Paris and the French. Meanwhile, my own holiday began on the first of August, and on the same day *The Wedding* was published, and was honoured by being made—as was the fashion now—the *Daily Mail* book of the month, and the *Daily Mirror* book of the week. Not, I am glad to say, that more literary periodicals despised it. In fact, it was a success. I had got away with a plotless novel once more, and there were pleasant press-cuttings and letters for quite a while. A fillip. It was pleasant, again, to be having a brief rest from the twelve hundred words a day. And on the second Sunday in August I set off for the Continent myself.

This was the first time, you may have noted, that I had left England's shores since the beginning of this book, though I had left them often enough in the past. But then work caught hold of me, and the dogs couldn't be left, and to be perfectly truthful I not only preferred my own country, but had, and still have, a profound horror of standing in queues. I am so old now that I can easily remember when one went abroad without passports. But I was much embittered by a later period when, if one succeeded in getting abroad at all, most of the time there was spent in waiting for various authorities to sanction one's return. And though I had also discovered that these delays could be much reduced by offering five francs to anyone who looked important, the iron had rather entered into my soul; so that even when some of these obstructions to human intercourse were temporarily removed, I still felt that I would sooner read about foreign parts than go there.

For the present expedition, however, no passport was needed. I was going, accompanied by Diana, Anne, and our friend Eileen Dawson—to whose gaiety a previous allusion has been made, and whom we had all come to know very well indeed—no further than just across the Channel. To Dieppe, in fact; and if one left on a Sunday and returned on a Tuesday, one's ticket was apparently the only permit required. As Anne hadn't got a passport at all, and my own—even if I could find it—had long since lapsed, this suited us very well. So we all drove to Newhaven, embarked on a fine British

vessel—which would subsequently be turned into a hospital ship and sunk—and as the sea was glassy and the sun was shining, we all had a hearty lunch.

On our arrival we drove to an hotel, booked rooms, and set out to see the sights. Roughly speaking, there weren't any. The Casino, which we were dashingingly proposing to enter, was found to be closed. An attempt to bathe was completely thwarted by the disgusting accommodation provided; though we didn't discover this until we had paid for it. I was beginning to see why the beach at Splashcliff was so often covered with French citizens; which had always puzzled me, for it is a dreadful beach, until I examined their own. Nevertheless, this was still an outing, and to prove it I undertook to take the whole party to dinner at a still larger hotel. This was a mistake. The food was distinctly international, and the wine, which I had somehow imagined would be cheaper in France, turned out to be nothing of the kind. I was beginning to wonder if I had brought enough money, though I still tried to keep this thought to myself.

In the night a cold snap developed, and in the morning it looked very much like rain. Yet still we must enjoy ourselves, so I hired a taxi, and we all drove over to Pourville, which I had gathered was pretty stimulating and smart. This was another mistake. The hotel had gone bankrupt, there were no gay crowds, and though the swimming-pool was still functioning, we had a cold and lonely bathe. Also I was expected to change, for some reason, in the ladies' lavatory—though fortunately no ladies appeared. And again, though I had done my best to pay for our bathing in advance, my offers were rejected by all and sundry; that's to say until I got into the water, when a fierce man seemed to expect me to produce the entrance-fee from where I was. Luckily, the taxi was still waiting—no doubt it had known what to expect—and we all drove back to Dieppe. It was pouring with rain now, and was bitterly cold.

However, as there was nothing to do in the hotel, we all went shopping; picking our way as delicately as we could over what appeared to be a number of open sewers. Diana bought a cheese. Eileen bought a bird-cage for her canary. I didn't buy anything, for I could see a financial crisis approaching. But I put the cheese in the bird-cage, and carried them both. We then had a rather cheaper dinner, with slightly cheaper wine, at our own hotel.

During the second and last night the wind rose. I could hear it rising, and slept very fitfully indeed. As soon as it was light enough, I looked out of the window. I'd never seen such waves. There was a steamer in what one might call the offing which kept practically disappearing altogether. The noise was deafening. There was spray all over the lawns in front of the hotel. And the hotel itself was shaking like a jelly.

I dressed rather sombrely. When I came downstairs I heard someone telling somebody else that a kind of pier, at the bathing establishment, had been washed away. But we hadn't got passports, for even the two travellers who possessed them hadn't brought them, so that if we didn't re-embark this morning we should presumably be cast into gaol. Or if in spite of this we attempted to stay on—which there was no other temptation to do—I saw myself facing a second charge of being unable to meet the bill.

It was at about this stage that I suddenly dashed past the open sewers again, rushed into a chemist's shop, and demanded a cure for sea-sickness. I was given a bottle of peacock-blue tablets, and came struggling back. I packed. We all packed. I asked for the bill, and was left with about eight francs; which was now, in fact, the entire capital of the whole expedition. Fortunately, the fare for the hotel omnibus had been included. But it was less fortunate that just as it was on the point of starting, the head-waiter rushed out and said that he'd forgotten to charge for our coffee last night. I was desperate. I took a high hand and said I'd send him a cheque for it; which I did, as a matter of fact, though it was never acknowledged. And thus we approached the quay.

This time, of course, the ship in which we were to travel was French, and very small. It was also very dirty. Furthermore, though it was still lying in the inner harbour, it was already jogging up and down like a rocking-horse. And the tempest was absolutely howling through its rigging.

We took our seats in a stuffy corner, which a little later—but there was no chance of moving then—turned out to be a few feet from a kind of sink where the stewards emptied the basins. "Would you like a tablet?" I asked.

"No, thank you," said Diana, who is a very good sailor.

"No, thank you," said Anne, who still thought it was all rather fun.

"No, thank you," said Eileen, who seemed to have some prejudice against unknown and peacock-blue drugs.

In these circumstances I thought it would be cowardly, or possibly rash, to take a tablet myself. So I didn't. The ship gave a frightful lurch, and the quay began jerking away. The usual natives were staring at us, as we went bucketing along, in their usual, brutish fashion; and I was just going to say what I thought about them, when the whole vessel rose high up in the air, and came down again with such a thump that I was convinced it had hit a rock.

It hadn't, however. This was its method of progress. Up—up—up. A horrible moment of twisting suspense. And then—crash!—it hit the water again, and the waves swept over the funnels. The stewards were getting busy with the basins, but they weren't always very successful in aiming at the sink. Diana's face was pale green. Anne's was the colour of vellum. Eileen was observed to be staggering towards some darker and lower retreat.

I swallowed a tablet.

Within one minute not only all nausea but all fear had left me. I now wanted to go up on deck, and should have, no doubt, if—owing to the fury of the elements—the doors hadn't been locked. But I smiled gaily. The spectacle of groaning passengers and skidding stewards merely added to my sense of well-being. I'd never had such a pleasant trip in my life.

"Come on!" I said to my suffering wife and daughter. "You *must* have one of these. They're marvellous!"

So Anne took one, with precisely the same result. And then Diana tried to take one. It was touch and go, because all her swallowing apparatus was now doing its utmost to act in reverse. Yet as soon as she succeeded—which she did in the end—all her troubles were over, too. She was no longer green. If I'd had any money left, she would certainly have asked for a steak. But she did penetrate to the Ladies' Saloon—where the most ghastly scenes were going on—with another tablet for Eileen.

Unluckily, however, poor Eileen was so far gone already—though she, too, regards herself as a good sailor—that no message of hope seemed to reach her consciousness. Or else she was too busy praying for the boat to go down to be able to think of anything else. Or perhaps her principles, even on the verge of dissolution, still warned her against the unknown. So Diana's mission



of mercy failed, though there was no relapse upstairs. The boat was an hour late, but we all laughed heartily about our preposterous week-end; and so did poor Eileen within a moment of reaching dry land. "Now," she said, "you'll all be sorry; because anything that can cure one like that is bound to have the most awful after-effects."

But she was wrong. Not one of us had a headache. Not one of our throats or tongues dried up. Our eyes still sparkled. We felt grand.

So that's the story of Dieppe and the peacock-blue tablets, and of the entry in my account-book which just says "Never Again!" I didn't mean it, of course—or not by the time I wrote it—but it was quite true. Diana and both my daughters, with or without the rest of the tablets, would still cross the Channel on a number of other days. But I put it off. I was always busy, or there was always some reason for retaining my island status. And now it rather looks as if I'd left it too late. There are no trips to Dieppe now, so it's no use my telling you where to look for that chemist. Once we were all allowed to be seasick whenever we wanted. But the leaders have put an end to that.

The Hopwoods came over. The Mackails went over to the Milnes'. Mary returned from Kitzbühel, but went straight down to Somerset, in a rather grown-up way. Round came the Rooklington Produce Show. And then—with one of my rather unpopular early starts—the rest of us all set off for Gloucestershire. But it was a hundred and fifty miles. I didn't know the road, and when one is taking a wife, a daughter, two Pokes, and a powerful lot of luggage, one doesn't want to run things too fine. Also, as it was a very hot day, Diana forgave me; for we were half-way there before the real roasting began. As usual, she wanted to keep on stopping, and some fiend impelled me to attempt the whole drive in one burst. But there were compromises. We got there safely. And on the next day Mary joined us, too.

Diana had been trying to describe the new house to me for some time, but she can't draw plans, and all I had gathered was that it was on the side of a precipice. This indeed proved to be the case, so that ten days there, so far as the Rover's clutch and brakes were concerned, were the equivalent of about six months elsewhere.

Another result of the precipice was that from two sides of the house there were very remarkable views. Late eighteenth-century. Many signs of British individuality at various periods, concluding with some very recent effects by Diana's mother and her architect. A number of doors—but perhaps this was my fault as much as theirs—whose lintels caught me sharply on the forehead until I learnt to duck in time. A biggish garden, terraced in places, but also for the most part on a fairly acute slope. And plans already, with the encouragement of the architect, for more terraces, and a fountain, and a miniature swimming-pool. No, it wasn't Nonesuch, though the reappearance of many familiar objects often brought a reminder; but of course it was much more of a place and an estate than our modest Rooklington House. It had lovely prospects of a big gorge in the Cotswolds, and though the district was fairly thickly sprinkled with buildings, it was all—until they started planting aerodromes all round it—peaceful and quiet enough. And of course there were kindness and hospitality, and plenty of provisions for ourselves and the dogs. I have now suddenly decided to allude to it henceforth as Hillside Hall.

Here, then, we resumed some of the old, Nonesuch habits, though all on a simpler scale. Diana's mother gardened, and Diana followed her round and tried to stop her. Her father, though still feeling the effects of his illness, took long walks at odd hours—regularly appearing for most meals just as everyone else had finished—and fed every animal that he passed on his way. We fully expected now that he would send for his donkeys. But he didn't, and they would still be our guests at the point where this record breaks off.

There were also some expeditions—to Bath, to Malmesbury, to the Stricklands at Apperley—which would become part of the Hillside ritual from now on. And neighbours came to tea. And Diana went calling with her mother. And I discovered the Nonesuch croquet-hoops, and hammered them into the largest of the terraced lawns. Still holiday-time, in fact; but it was soon over. On September 2nd we all returned to Rooklington, and two days later I was back on my short stories.

This was the date on which, under the original agreement, our tenant was to vacate Church Street. But first she had asked for an extension of three weeks, and then—while we were still think-

ing this over—her solicitors had reported to the house-agent that she had “no funds in hand.” Why, then, we let her stay on for one week, I can’t imagine. A mixture, I take it, of my own weak-mindedness and Diana’s soft-heartedness. I had already acquired a number of liabilities on her behalf, for somebody had to discharge them if gas, light, and telephone weren’t all to be cut off; but though she stayed for the extra week, she didn’t pay for this, either. Early in October—to carry on with this rather painful part of the story—I had a further message, though by this time she was in a furnished flat, to the effect that she had no money at all. By now she also owed me £17 10s. for damage and destruction, so I got in touch with my own lawyer, who immediately began doing his stuff. It was generally agreed that she owed me, altogether, about sixty pounds, and from my ring-side seat I watched some lively efforts by the lawyer to get this out of her. In November he served her with a Writ. In December I swore an Affidavit. In February it was discovered that a recent Act of Parliament had failed, not for the first time, to embody what its sponsors had intended, so that the Judgment which I had obtained was now held to be of somewhat doubtful value. My lawyer offered to make our victim bankrupt, but admitted—though I never knew why—that this would cost me £20. So I spared her, and adopted an alternative suggestion by which she was to be cross-examined as to her means in the Courts. By a sudden payment of £15 she managed to get this postponed. And in June, to my intense astonishment, my lawyer actually received a cheque for the balance and all my costs. Triumph. Diana thought I’d been an absolute brute; but whether this were true or not, one can’t very well stop lawyers once one has let them loose. Moreover, it was I, not she, who was the creditor. And, again, as soon as I began telling this story to my acquaintances, it appeared that there was hardly a street in London where my tenant’s parties weren’t notorious, nor a householder whom she hadn’t bilked. “We need hardly add,” wrote the agent, in the following October, when the correspondence was finally closed, “that we are extremely sorry that this matter should have turned out so unsatisfactory.” So was I; and I couldn’t help feeling that nine-tenths of it was entirely his own fault. But now, you see, we have jumped more than a year ahead. So, of course, we must jump back.

To Rooklington; where I was working, from where we went over to tea with Leonora Cazalet (but Plum was back at Le Touquet), where more of Mary's friends came to stay with us, and where I now made a new friend of my own. A Scotch stockbroker, of incredible kindness, who was now quartered in the farm-house, about half a mile away, which we had once rented ourselves. It was his glorious custom to open bottles of champagne between noon and one o'clock on Sundays, and I was expected whenever I chose to come. But this wasn't the only reason why I went there. He radiated so much of the assurance which I lacked myself, that I could take large draughts of this as well as of the champagne—and my depression—even on a Sunday morning—never got beyond his hospitable front door. Perhaps if he had stayed there, those bottles would have led to my downfall. Diana, indeed, seemed convinced sometimes that it was all wrong for me to be so cheerful at lunch. But, alas, he left us, after a while, for a lordlier demesne elsewhere, and thus passed out of my life altogether. I insist, however, on remaining grateful to him. And I have never—again alas!—found anybody to take his deeply appreciated place.

September 16th. Fearful gale in the night. None of us slept a wink, we all thought the house was coming down, and in the morning the garden was wrecked, the lawn was covered with tiles from the roof, and one of the garage doors was blown in. Another good reason, I thought, for returning to London; but as a matter of fact we had arranged this anyhow, and a week later—having first deposited Anne at her boarding-school again, and having once more laid up the Rover—I was back, with everyone else, at Church Street. My tenant had left a pervasive and not exactly aromatic smell behind, and as we already knew had done a good deal of all-round damage. But we were home. The goldfish, thank goodness, were all right. The dogs were delighted to greet the block. Charles could sit staring at his old friends on the garden walls again. Bully was once more in his own corner of the dining-room. And presently—though not, I must admit, for several more weeks—the smell gradually disappeared. Almost exactly six months since I had last slept in this bed, and written at that desk, and gone strolling about Chelsea with my thoughts. But the gap soon seemed to fill up, though I didn't propose to make such an experiment

again. I was a Londoner. I knew it. It was true that there was a cloud over Abyssinia, and that our mystical foreign policy seemed scarcely to be calming the cauldron. True, also, that I still had nightmares about bombs. But there was nothing to indicate to a hard-working author, as he occasionally gazed from his study window at the spire of a church, quite how soon its top would be knocked off by an errant unit of the balloon-barrage; or quite how soon he would find it preferable to spend the night on the kitchen floor; or what he would see, when he emerged from this retreat, in the way of craters and far worse devastation. No, he still couldn't really believe that our foreign policy was as mystical as all that.

There was no reason, either—quite the contrary, in fact, from many points of view—why Mary shouldn't now go to Paris. For it was all arranged, Diana was to take her, a school-friend would be under the same roof, an even closer school-friend was to be at another establishment in the same city, and I had already written a very large cheque. So off she went—though with considerable reluctance, I am afraid, at the last moment—and Diana stood her a night at an hotel, and took her to the top of the Arc de Triomphe in the morning, and gave her and her special friend a special tea at Rumpelmayer's, and installed her in her own establishment, and dined with another mother at the hotel that night, and slept there, and came back to me. And to the dogs, of course, who in the absence of Anne as well as her mother, had again spent two nights on my bed.

Alone, as one might say, at last. With all possible affection for our children, and with a sense of responsibility amounting almost to a sense of guilt, this was a moment that I had been awaiting since the hour of Mary's birth. Of course, it couldn't really take us back to Walpole Street, and to the days when we were really alone. Yet by a good deal of work and some luck we had brought up two daughters to a point where one was being expensively polished in Paris and the other was being expensively educated—not that she didn't know it all already—on the South Coast. I was still devoted to them. I would, and did, write long letters to them, several times a week. But if they were absent on legitimate business, and weren't ill, or in trouble, then surely their parents might have a brief period of calm together, after sixteen and a half years.

Some people, of course, said that children were only sent to school or a finishing course so as to get them out of the way. I can meet

that charge, for it was Diana who had made both arrangements, and Diana was the one who never thought of herself. Yet now that the house was so much quieter, and that the telephone had practically stopped ringing altogether, and that in the evenings it was just an author, his wife, and two Pokes, I hoped that it would be a kind of rest for her, too. Though if it were, for the unexpectedly short time that was granted, it was the last that has yet come her way.

But we did have some peaceful evenings in our drawing-room, and there was a real echo or mirage of Walpole Street days for a while. The dogs again had longer and more regular visits to the Park. And if three servants looking after two people were a sociological crime, or if the fact that less work for them didn't necessarily mean less subterranean sensibility, at least we could expect a little more attention than had sometimes been possible in the past. There was another flash-back when Plum suddenly telephoned to say that he was in London, and we both dined with him—though I had done this alone on the first evening of all—at the Savoy Grill. There was a week-end at Rooklington again, in the middle of October, with Anne over for the night once more. She seemed well, and said she was happy as a regular boarder. Mary's correspondence was less cheerful and more critical, but Diana was going over to see her presently, and though we should have preferred her to be enjoying herself—as she now says she did—we weren't really alarmed.

During the next week the Milnes treated us to another banquet and outing; the film of *Top Hat* at the Carlton cinema. And on the Sunday we again dined with J. M. B. He was in very good form; so was his canary; and afterwards he offered to read us his new play. We were both rather overwhelmed, and the strain became heavier than ever as paroxysms of coughing seized him again and again. At the end of the first Act he paused. I had been so sensible of the honour, so anxious about his cough, and was still so conscious of the impossibility of making the right comment—for even praise and admiration, I felt, were bound, considering our respective positions, to sound either impertinent or condescending—that of course I failed. It seemed cruel, after those paroxysms, even to ask him to go on. Diana stumbled over some words, and I stumbled over some others. He got up and began walking sud-

denly. He was putting the play away. The ghastly thing was that we couldn't conceivably say: "Look here, we both love you, and we'll sit here all night if you like; but how the blazes can we ask you to go on reading, when we don't know if it isn't bad for you, or whether we haven't jarred hideously on you already in at least a dozen of a hundred, inevitable ways?" So we went on stumbling for a bit, and then we stumbled out of the Adelphi flat. There was a vague understanding that we should come back presently, and hear the other two Acts. But though we did come back, and he seemed to have forgiven us, the play was in trouble by then, and we had missed our only chance. I still feel hot and cold whenever I think of that evening. And we never heard those last two Acts until the fatal night at His Majesty's Theatre, of which I have written elsewhere.

Diana, not surprisingly, went to bed after this with another bad chill. But I wrote another short story—there would be seventeen, altogether, this year—and at the end of that old-fashioned month we dressed up and went forth, for some reason, to the much more auspicious first night of *Call it a Day*. Then I turned back to *Back Again*. Then—the beginning of November now—there was a good evening at Church Street, with Dot, and Alan Milne—Daphne being on a visit to America—and the Peter Davieses. They all stayed till well after midnight, and the host and hostess weren't the least out of it this time. Indeed, I think we'd all have that evening again; if only we could.

A telegram from Ned Sheldon in New York. "Thanks for delightful Douglasses please come over Denis love to Diana—Ned." This meant, of course, that my efforts to make these other friends like each other had been crowned with success. A few weeks later the telegram was followed by a glowing and Ned-like letter, and it was only a few days after this that I was able to show it to Douglas and little Dorothy themselves. But I couldn't cross the Atlantic, much as I wished to go. I was working too hard. I couldn't take holidays. I needed the money for the overhead and everything else. Now, in war-time, Ned still asks me, and I still say I'm coming as soon as I can. Yet even with the most hopeful view of the future, I'm afraid this remains a dream.

On November 15th, or four days after the two minutes' silence,

there was a General Election. The reason, so far as I could make out, was that the National Government thought it would have a better chance now than next year, when its constitutional five years would be up. So it faced the constituencies, and ought to have done it again in 1940; but didn't, because when this country fights for Democracy it immediately suspends all the democratic privileges that it can. As to what this particular election was about, it appeared—apart from the usual business of Ins *versus* Outs—to be a kind of competition as to which side was keener on the League of Nations. The Ins, who slobbered all over it, were prepared, it would seem, to show a firm hand without doing very much to strengthen it. The Outs, I gathered, would welcome a war with anyone outside the League, but were still more violently opposed to providing the means for it. I may have misunderstood them both, and certainly they would both say so now—or at any rate about themselves—but the whole thing struck me as desperately footling, and as fairly dangerous, too. If I could have voted for Lord Palmerston, I should have done so. But I couldn't, of course; I could detect no realist anywhere; and, besides, when Lord Palmerston threatened, he meant it, and there was force behind his threats. Alternatively, and even preferably, I should have been delighted to vote for the United States of Europe; or, better still, for the United States of the World. But pride and prestige wouldn't let me. The League, doomed from the moment that the United States of America had turned their backs on it—or in other words from the outset—must still stand in everyone's way. A rotting corpse, to be used by its diminishing members as a clumsy and quite ineffective political weapon. An asset only to its open enemies. A poisonous nuisance, by this time and in its present condition, to everyone else.

Why vote at all, then? I can't imagine. But I did. I went out, with a heavy cold on me, and again voted for Sir Samuel Hoare; and though fifteen thousand Chelsea electors never bothered to go to the poll at all, he was returned by a large majority, and so was the National Government—even if it did lose a hundred and seventy-odd seats—and there we all were. In another few minutes Sir Samuel was going to fall into disgrace, over the Hoare-Laval proposals, and his successor at the Foreign Office would take on the apparently welcome task of providing us with another enemy.



While in a few more years, during which Sir Samuel would have bobbed up again at the Home Office and the Air Ministry, he would suddenly vanish from his constituency altogether, and no one would take his place. Democracy? Well, I suppose it still isn't exactly either Communism or Fascism, though we have acquired a good deal of both. But its real name, of course—which is also the real name of both the other so-called systems—was Muddle-Through. Only one mustn't say so, wherever one is. For King Log is always followed by King Stork, and one had better be quiet then—until King Log comes rolling back again. My poor human race—I do so deeply appreciate your extraordinary patience and courage. But Phineas T. Barnum (whom of course I couldn't vote for, either) was unquestionably right.

So my cold was much worse, after the performance of this public duty, when Diana set off on the following day for a week-end with Mary in Paris. She took her and her friends out to various gaieties, but Mary didn't seem to be very well, Diana was worried also by her continued resistance to the régime, and she came home again after two bad crossings—but for some reason she wouldn't take the blue tablets—in a considerable state of fatigue. My cold was better, but our afflictions weren't over. Earlier in the month Diana had been down to see Anne at her school, and Anne had complained of her eyes. So of course she must come up and be taken to the very best oculist; and on November 19th up she came, by an early train, and Diana met her and took her to Harley Street, and I was to meet them both, at my mixed Club, for lunch.

There was black news for me there. The oculist had announced that Anne's eyes—which had been perfectly all right at the beginning of the term—had just gone with a rush. Whatever the reason, and whatever the school's responsibility in the matter, he had forbidden her to return to it, or to do any reading or writing at all; and already an optician in the neighbourhood was fashioning a pair of those thick lenses which our unfortunate younger daughter has been using ever since. I was appalled, as I plied her with the Club's special barley-water and her favourite food. I felt far more than guilty—though she had asked to go to the school herself, and it was anything but a Dothegirls Hall. My own eyes had never bothered me, Diana's still hadn't started a much milder variety of

spectacles herself. But now Anne was being punished. And Anne was the daughter who did all the reading. And Anne was taking it so extraordinarily well.

Another thought. That vast school-outfit wasn't going to be much use now. And another, I am afraid. Here, after barely six weeks in all, was the end of that attempted revival of Walpole Street. Perhaps I had looked forward to it too much, or had appreciated it too much, and Nemesis—so skilful at striking one through others—had noted this grievous fault. But however I looked at it, it was a cruel blow for us all.

We telegraphed to the school, we took Anne back to Church Street, and her room was hastily prepared. And one character, at any rate, was delighted. Topsy, of course; who had been up to that room so often during the last two months, to snuffle hopefully at the door. But would now be welcomed there whenever she arrived, and could again spend hours—fast asleep and perfectly happy—curled up on the foot of Anne's bed. And Anne herself, though wearing the new spectacles now, and pledged, also, to regular visits to the oculist as long as the money held out, was still being cheerful and brave. Presently, and mainly so as to pass the time, she went back to her London school, and sat there listening to the lessons for the last few weeks of the term. And presently she would be reading again, as voraciously and rapidly as ever. And her spectacles would come to be accepted by all, because there was nothing else that anyone could do.

It was just about now, as I have said, that little Dorothy and Douglas returned from America, to resume their professional work in London, and to see a good deal, I am glad to say, of the Mackails. No break here, as I had secretly expected. The Mackails absorbed Douglas, and Douglas succeeded in absorbing the Mackails. We knew a young married couple again—who were looking for a house in Chelsea—after a gap which I suddenly realized had lasted far too long. And as this was one of the author's favourite subjects, he studied it closely and enthusiastically, and made a number of technical notes.

But not, as it now appeared, for immediate use. I had finished the revision of *Back Again*, and was just on the point of resuming the short stories, when suddenly my telephone rang, and a guarded

voice invited me to call at the Gaumont studios at Shepherd's Bush, though it seemed determined not to say why. So I was rather excited, and kept the appointment; and there—in what had once been somebody's bedroom in a little house in Lime Grove, but was now incorporated in the administrative offices—a severe-looking stranger informed me why I had come. It seemed that Gainsborough Pictures, whose own studio was in Islington, but who were closely connected with Gaumont-British, were anxious to star Miss Cicely Courtneidge in a film that was to be rather less of a song-and-dance affair than some of her recent successes, and that someone had suggested my name as a collaborator on the script. Much, it was admitted, hinged on the American director, whose arrival was shortly expected; but meanwhile her husband, Jack Hulbert, had roughed out a story, and the notion was that we should work together until this was knocked into shape. If all went well, I should have something called a screen-credit—which meant, I gathered, that my name would be flashed for a moment at the beginning of the film. And nobody knew for how long I should be needed. And how much did I want?

I hadn't the foggiest notion. I had come along with the vague hope that I was to receive an offer for one of my published works. So I looked rather stupid, I suppose—for I was still thinking of all the commissions from the monthly magazines, and wondering what to do about them—and the severe-looking executive suggested twenty-five pounds a week.

This was another surprise, for so far no publisher or editor had ever paid me a salary. I could earn much more by sticking to the stories, and probably—though I had never worked it out—by starting another novel. But I was quite conscious of the glamour. I may have been longing for a change. And in any case, even in this curious little bedroom, where illuminated signals kept glowing all the time and nobody paid the faintest attention to them, I was an easy prey when the executive said that of course it wasn't very much, but just look what they were paying some of the old hands. Perhaps this was a great moment in my life, then. Perhaps, in a few years, I should have developed into an old hand, too. I knew what Diana would say—for she has always wanted me to take every professional risk. And I knew what she would say if I came home and told her I had refused. So I accepted. The execu-

tive emitted a short sigh of relief. And I was to meet Jack Hulbert, at the Gainsborough studios, on the following afternoon.

They're not very easy to find, if you don't know them. But I felt I was on the right track when I turned down a side street in the depths of Islington, and a number of little boys rushed at me and asked for my autograph. I waved these misguided urchins aside. I discovered a kind of stage-door. And soon enough I was having tea not only with Jack Hulbert, in a most remarkable overcoat, but with Edward Black—brother to George, and "Ted" to his friends—who was the head of Gainsborough Pictures. Delightful people. I never quite knew whether they had ever really heard of me, but they didn't waste time. In a few moments Jack Hulbert had outlined a story which, so far as I could see, could have gone straight to the script-writers at once. But if he still wanted me to collaborate—and especially as he seemed to have done all the hard part already—then of course I was perfectly willing. Why, I wondered, couldn't editors and publishers give me my plots like this? And why didn't they put me on a salary? There seemed everything to be said for the films.

I saw one being made before I left. It was *Tudor Rose*, and a man on a horse kept riding up to a gateway, while artificial rain fell from pipes overhead on to a floor of broken cork that smelt (though I can't imagine why) of water-cress. And it was very interesting indeed for the first five times, though I then managed to tear myself away. The same or some indistinguishable little boys again asked for my autograph, and were again eluded. And I went back to Church Street, where on the following morning I at once started writing out the story that I had just been told.

There ensued a somewhat fantastic fortnight, during which I was constantly keeping appointments, at the oddest hours, at Jack Hulbert's house in Curzon Street. Where he was invariably charming, though I still wasn't always convinced that he knew who I was. And where so-called conferences took place with the assistance not only of various characters from Islington—to each of whom I had to read the whole of the story again—but of a number of Jack Hulbert's more personal henchmen as well. On one occasion Miss Courtneidge herself flitted by, and I reminded her of how we had once played in a charade together, but couldn't feel really certain that she remembered it. And in all the intervals I re-wrote

the story—to which everyone had now contributed further ideas of their own—until the inevitable moment at which it no longer struck me as having any meaning at all.

This was fatigue, of course. I came across it the other day, and was astonished to find it so ingenious and entertaining. But I need hardly tell you what actually happened. The American director arrived, and, of course, he hadn't come all this way for nothing. He had come, in fact, to earn a very large fee, and, of course the best way of showing that he was worth it was to refuse to have anything to do with our script at all. I was still working on it, when another voice rang up and told me the whole thing was off. And whether this were a relief or not, it at any rate marked the end of my connection with the films.

Or no. Not quite. Many weeks afterwards, and long after I had received my last cheque, a vast envelope brought me an interminable agreement with Gainsborough Pictures (1928) Limited, under the terms of which I was to pledge myself, among other things, to go to any part of the world where they wished to send me, but to bring no claim against them if in the course of these travels I lost my hat or umbrella. So of course I signed it and sent it back.

Later still I had another communication inviting me to take tickets for the Film Ball. And I did this—for after all, in a sense, they had paid me those cheques for nothing—and asked that the tickets should be presented to some deserving couple; so that I wondered, for quite a while, whether I had also precipitated a romance. But that was the real end. There were no more repercussions after that. And by the middle of December—to turn back again—I was writing a short story about a child and an oculist. And Mary was home from Paris, though to tell the truth we hadn't expected her for another week; bitterly disappointed that the house wasn't full of film-stars. For of course I had told her everything in my letters; but she hadn't given me time to tell her that the whole thing was over.

Here we all were, though, once more, as Christmas again approached. Diana and Mary in bed with colds—and a thick fog outside. Diana still in bed, though she struggled out for an ancestral lunch, on Christmas Day itself. On Boxing Day, while Mary went out with her special friend, I took Anne and her spectacles

to a conjuring entertainment at the Royalty Theatre, which we both enjoyed very much. But Diana oughtn't to have got up like that. On the 29th her cold was worse. On the 30th she was back in bed. And on the 31st her doctor came, and announced that she had influenza, and a touch of pleurisy, too.

What an ending, to what a year! The handwriting in my account-book, which has been steadily deteriorating for months and months, is now, frankly, alarming. But I hadn't noticed it myself yet. There were only moments, perhaps, such as this New Year's Eve, when I felt I was both Atlas and Job. I was terribly worried that night, as Victoria snored on my bed, and Topsy pushed hard against Anne upstairs. But of course I didn't know what real worry was. Nobody did, at the end of 1935.

## CHAPTER X

1936

THE pictures at the beginning of my 1936 account-book are a portrait of June—aged eight weeks—the second of the famous chimpanzee babies at the Zoo, and a head-on view, also taken from a newspaper, of three very noble farm-horses ploughing. But June was born in June, of course, and the horses weren't ploughing in January. Both photographs were cut out and pasted in much later, and at the moment, if I had been keeping a real illustrated scrap-book, it would have contained nothing but Diana's temperature-chart. We engaged a night-nurse—she wouldn't have a day-nurse, too—and at first she was a little better, while I had a minor but quite severe cold myself; and then she was worse—much worse; and then, though very slowly, she began to mend. On January 11th she came down in a dressing-gown for dinner, but there was no chance on the next day, when Anne was fourteen, of her leaving the house. So the only celebration was a lunch, to which I took both daughters; and still the doctor was coming, and there were to be injections now, and indeed it would be weeks before she had really made up the lost ground.

Both daughters, meanwhile, had gone as mad over *Romeo and Juliet*—with John Gielgud again—as Mary had previously been over

*Hamlet*. I don't know how often they saw it together, though they were a distinct help to its record run; but on the night after Anne's birthday I saw it myself, with both of them, and again as Mary's guest. My favourite play, too, in a way, though in this case—owing to my age, no doubt—I wasn't entirely convinced by the new type of scenery. And I, at any rate, also had a pretty bad fright. Almost at the end of the play—at the entrance to the Capulets' tomb, in fact—somebody dropped a torch. The next thing I knew was that it was flaring up on the stage, and that Shakespeare was rather forgotten as various characters re-entered hastily and started stamping on it. Here we all go, I thought. There'll be a panic, even if we're not burnt to death, and Diana's ill in bed, and she'll be the only one left. So I said nothing and did nothing, and within ten seconds, I suppose, the flames had been extinguished, the superfluous characters had withdrawn again, and the performance was resumed. Whew! We'd been right in the middle of the stalls, and there was no gang-way. But the children—though it might be true that the cremation of audiences in this country was practically unknown now—hadn't turned a hair. So I still didn't say much about it, though I hadn't forgotten the Iroquois fire in Chicago or a picture of an earlier disaster which had haunted my childhood—and we all rode safely home in a taxi.

Then, three nights later, came another play. Again it was one of the Milnes' munificent outings, and they were to take us, after a feast at Mallord Street, to Noel Coward's *To-Night*, at 8.30, which had opened a week ago. Diana wanted to go, for it was a distinctly special occasion. But she oughtn't to go. And then, of course, she did go. The first time that she had left the house this year. And suddenly it started snowing. Torment for her companion, who was now convinced that she would be in for pneumonia. But he was wrong, thank goodness. It did her good, after all; and in the morning, when she took Anne to the oculist again, a slight improvement was reported here, too. There must still be no reading, but there was much more hope. Perhaps, then, January was to be merciful, after all. I touched wood. I worked like a demon; four short stories again by the end of the month. And the Fates decided to strike elsewhere.

On Monday, January 20th—when Anne again resumed some rather desultory attendances at her London day-school—Diana and

I had arranged to go off to the Embassy Theatre, at Swiss Cottage, where Douglas was opening in a new thriller which we all hoped would be another enormous success. But on the Sunday it seemed clear that the King was dying, and after the bulletin on Monday afternoon we didn't really know whether there would be a performance at all. Mary, of course, was going to *Romeo and Juliet* again, and we all hesitated, and then we all set off, though we were quite expecting to be turned back at the doors. However, we weren't, though there was a sombre atmosphere at Swiss Cottage, and a tension that had nothing to do with the play. Douglas committed a murder—though it was quite accidental, so far as I can remember—and there was some heavy and inopportune business with a body in a large trunk. Applause. Whispering, even in the midst of it, as more rumours ran through the house. No sign—but how could there be?—of the enormous success; and in fact the play, though it was moved to the St. Martin's, only ran a few feeble weeks. Bad luck; but I'm afraid it was rather feeble, too, and certainly it was miserably ill-timed.

We had promised to meet Mary at the Savoy Grill; so we did, though here, too, there was a strange kind of nervous hush. *Romeo and Juliet*, of course, was an established triumph, and had been packed out as usual. But there had been no National Anthem at the end, which there should have been, whoever was King; and the audience had naturally taken this to mean that George V was dead. But he wasn't, though he died while we were sitting in the Grill-Room, and this time one of the rumours was authoritatively confirmed. The company didn't break up, though the hush was more noticeable than ever, for whether we had all finished our suppers or not, at least we must still pay our bills. So we sat there for a bit, and I thought, "Poor Douglas." And I thought: "The last time this happened I was still at school." Not very deep thoughts, perhaps, but the deeper ones were incapable of being put into words, either then or now. Presently I paid my own bill, and we slipped away.

That, as I say, was on the Monday. Diana was still far from well, even at the end of the week. But on the Sunday her loyalty made her do the most dreadful deed. She insisted on joining the great queue that was slowly approaching the Lying-in-State in Westminster Hall, and for four hours she shuffled along with it, until at last she was in sight of the goal. Then a policeman said that from



this point it would still take another two hours, and she gave it up, and came home, and went to bed. The disgraceful thing, of course, is that I wasn't with her; for on a Sunday I hadn't even the excuse of work. But then she knew what her husband was like in crowds and queues, and she forgave him again. And surely her tribute was noted in Heaven.

On the following evening little Dorothy dined with us, preparatory to the first night in the doll's house which Douglas and she had now taken in the corner of a Chelsea square, where for three and a half years we should be seeing them again and again. On the Tuesday Diana took both children to see the King's funeral procession from a familiar window in Parliament Street, by the courtesy and kindness of her father. And on the Wednesday, after several protests which must again be necessarily overborne, Mary returned to Paris. She had made another rather special friend there, in her own establishment, and it was with this girl and by the Golden Arrow that she set off. Well, Diana was quite unfit to go with her, and I was a selfish, work-ridden brute. But if it comes to that, you couldn't possibly lose your way on the Golden Arrow, and the girls would be met—and were met—at the other end. A quieter house again, with Anne at school in the mornings. And more notes, in a sense, on the stage.

For Anne had spent part of her Christmas tips on a toy theatre, complete with a rather primitive production of *Jack the Giant-Killer*; but having done this was a little balked by the next phase, whereas I—— Well, no; I didn't exactly snatch it away from her, but my fingers were itching to be at it, and I took a deep dive into the past.

For when I was Anne's age—and, indeed, when I was considerably older—I had had a toy theatre of my own. It, too, had originally come from a shop, with its own scenery and characters—all by the famous B. Pollock of Hoxton—waiting to be cut out and pasted on to cardboard, and with its oil footlights, and its red curtain that rolled up from the bottom. But then I began improving it. I widened the proscenium opening. I fitted it with velvet tableau curtains and with an asbestos safety-curtain. I put in electric lighting, which in those days took some doing, and presently I fitted it with a revolving stage. Then I began building and painting scenery for it, a kind and skilful friend accepted an order to provide the

characters—though I did the comic ones and the crowds myself—and there were three mammoth productions at Mackail's Theatre (as it was called) in the great years of its glory. The first was *The Corsican Brothers*, with ghosts, duels, visions, snow, and everything else. The second was *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which I cut so mercilessly that it ran for about an hour; but there was no skimping in any other direction, for another part of the wood *was* another part of the wood at Mackail's, and there were even two different views of Theseus's palace. While the third was *Twelfth Night*, similarly and savagely cut, but with a prodigal number of elaborate sets. And I was just getting down to *As You Like It*, when I suddenly realized that I was nearly twenty, and had better start growing up.

So *Twelfth Night* was the end of it all, in January, 1912. I couldn't do everything alone, of course. I changed the scenery, I was property-master and electrician, I raised and lowered the curtains, I was responsible for all entrances and exits—on B. Pollock's tin slides (but at Mackail's Theatre they were all painted to match the floor-cloths)—from the O.P. side. But my younger sister was compelled to attend to these duties on the prompt side. My elder sister was dragged in to read all the female parts, a good-natured neighbour supplied the men's voices, and another long-suffering friend provided the music. I was implacable over the number of rehearsals, and whatever the final result was like—and sometimes I could hear the audience gasping as yet another well-known speech was reduced to two lines—at least there was never a stage wait or a technical hitch. And those audiences, thanks to the nature of my parents' circle, were really rather distinguished. J. M. B. used to come, and Andrew Bradley, and Ricketts and Shannon, and Anstey Guthrie, and Laurence Housman; and what they all thought of it I can't imagine; and I never asked them, for I was far too busy and pre-occupied, and miles away in the clouds. But it was this Theatre, of course, that induced J. M. B. to give me a real set to design, when I ran away from Oxford; and it was that set that led to G. B. S. doing the same thing. I might and perhaps ought to have devoted my life to it. But I didn't. There was a war, and I got married, and ultimately turned into an author instead.

You see, however, what was happening at the end of January, 1936. Anne had unconsciously tempted me, and the next thing was

that she was sitting, rather forlornly, in a corner of the school-room, while I began working on her theatre, too. Again I put in electric light—but Woolworth's and a bicycle-shop just round the corner had all the equipment now. Again I put in velvet tabs and a safety-curtain. But whereas at Mackail's Theatre there had been overhead lighting battens, and all the scenery had been built up on the revolving stage, here, in the much smaller Anne's Theatre we had a real reproduction of real flies. And then? Well, should we go ahead with *Jack the Giant-Killer*, or what should we do? I paused. I waited for inspiration. I suddenly remembered that I had a great deal of other work to do, and that I was forty-three.

So the game was suspended, for the time being, and as the proprietress showed no signs of continuing it by herself—but I don't blame her, for she had never asked me to make it all so complicated—the new theatre remained dark. Sometimes I thought of writing a play for it myself—perhaps with a part for Topsy—and sometimes I thought of other developments, too. But the fit had passed, and my energies were required elsewhere. The schoolroom, which was used so little now, continued to house the mere uncompleted outline of a dream.

Another first night in a real theatre. It looks as if we were making a habit of this now; but we weren't, and I don't really like first nights—because the actors don't act so well, and the audiences act far too much—and what had happened was that Mary had been going to have a farewell treat, with Diana, and had chosen the first night of Cochran's Adelphi revue, *Follow the Sun*. But this was postponed, owing to the King's death, so that it was I who now occupied the other seat in the front of the dress circle. Stars were cheered in the stalls, there was a broadcast commentary on their arrival by a man in a box. The curtain rose. We reached the interval. And suddenly I saw that Diana's hair had turned grey.

For a moment this was a fearful shock. And then I realized the truth. All through that first part of the entertainment someone in the upper circle must have been chain-smoking and gently tapping his cigarette over the parapet in front. It was ash that had covered my wife's unwitting head, and we had to go out into the corridor where I blew it off. But really, you know! At a smart first night, with double prices, in the heart of our great Empire. Disgusting, I

thought, in my old-fashioned way. And what's more, I still do.

In the middle of this month—which was February now—we had a spell down at Rooklington. And it was now, also, that the real bungalow-building began. A rash had broken out on the corner by the main road, and would soon be infecting the rest of this region. The syndicate had prepared a brochure, showing a photograph of a "Typical Residence on the Rooklington Estate," which had actually been taken somewhere else, and represented a solitary mansion with an immense garden. But the bungalows weren't the least like that. And the principal agents had erected a large notice-board announcing that the site had been town-planned; which just wasn't true, except in the sense that they had vaguely planned it themselves. They were also erecting a thatched cottage, on the main road, which was to serve as their letting office. And a little later they peppered both sides of this road with more notices—blazoning such slogans as "Twixt Downs and Sea," though as a matter of fact the sea was hidden at this point by a railway embankment—and with a number of large arrows directed towards the thatched cottage. So George Hughes and I wrote some unanswerable letters, which received elusive acknowledgments. And as some of the arrows said "Eyes Right!" and "Eyes Left!", I took this up with the Automobile Association, who in turn got the County Council to order their removal, as a danger to motorists. But I fear this was our only real triumph. We were persistent gad-flies, and the law was entirely on our side; but the builders went on building, whether their plans had been sanctioned or not. For this was apparently Progress; and even our tireless ingenuity couldn't stop that.

Back to London. Off to see little Dorothy in *Pride and Prejudice*, which I'm glad to say was another big success. That was on March 6th. And it was on Saturday, March 7th, that the Locarno Treaty was torn to bits and German troops re-entered the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland. This was accompanied by a proposal from Herr Hitler for a twenty-five-years' non-aggression pact; but whether the French and British Governments believed in his sincerity or not, they still appeared to have no policy of their own—either joint or separate—and the proposal lapsed, and again there was neither war nor peace. Everyone says now that this was the moment for violent repressive action, and that if it had been taken there would have been no more trouble elsewhere. But it

wasn't taken. Perhaps it couldn't have been taken. And in both France and England there were still plenty of newspapers and politicians to say that everything was all for the best. The blind leaders gave no lead, another step towards chaos was consolidated; and the people in all three countries were as powerless as before.

So I was scared, doubtful, puzzled, and indignant. But still I supposed that the leaders knew what they were up to, and of course I must get on with my own job. Eight short stories since the beginning of the year, and time for another novel. Again an idea had been gently germinating, in the midst of everything else, and we had come to the point where if I didn't start now, I probably never should. So I started. I was annoyed, in a way, to find that I must again write in the first person, and had again cast myself as an uncle. But it couldn't be helped; I was to be little more than a narrator this time; and the uncle was to have two nieces and no nephew now. In fact, there wouldn't really be the least resemblance between *Back Again* and *Jacinth*; for Jacinth herself, the elder niece and a débutante, was to be the unqualified heroine, and it was all to be rather gay and funny, if possible, with no middle-aged romance.

Oddly enough, the story was to open with her return from a finishing-school in Paris, so that already she was a little ahead of Mary; and as she flashed through her first season, she was further ahead still. That's the queer thing about fiction, as I have found it. I always seem to be drawing from experiences of ten or twenty years ago, or else I'm imagining something that hasn't yet begun. The present is quite useless to me, for either I haven't digested it, or I can't see the wood for the trees. So Jacinth and her adventures in fact owed little or nothing to Mary, even though both girls had been to Paris; for by the time that Mary was still only half-way out, Jacinth had had a whole year of it, and was engaged. Naturally, as the book wasn't published until September, 1937, there was a tendency to believe that I had pinched everything from what was going on under my nose. But I hadn't. I'd made it all up. And just as a real wedding had followed *The Wedding* in cloth covers, so a real débutante would never catch up with her hard-working father's pen. Yet some of my guesses weren't at all bad. For I could absorb things, it seemed, or my pen could, quite a long while before they happened.

There was to be a Peke in this book, too. I'd been fighting to keep them out ever since *Greenery Street*—not counting *Ian and Felicity*, which as a sequel had rules of its own—probably from a suspicion that if I once let go I should never write about anything else. But perhaps enough time had elapsed now, and my readers would forgive me. And of course it was very much easier to write a book with a Peke.

Meanwhile, as I turned to this new task—moving slowly, as yet, for there were to be twelve sub-plots—the real prospective débutante had been ill again in Paris (where she was treated by a doctor who sealed all the windows and made her wear a thick dressing-gown in bed), and Diana had decided, though the term wasn't really over, to go out and fetch her home. This time she took Anne, on March 20th, rescued Mary that very evening, and they all spent three nights at an hotel. And Anne, who was to be polished here, too, later on, was also taken to the top of the Arc de Triomphe and to Rumpelmayer's. And they all went to the Casino de Paris. And they all—in a moment of conscience, I suppose, on Diana's part—went to the Louvre. And they all went to see Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times*, which, if it comes to that, they could have done without crossing the Channel. And then they all came home again, to the dogs' delight, and though Mary wouldn't be seventeen until Saturday, it seemed that her education was finished, and that she was grown-up.

I don't know what she learnt in Paris, for though she says she learnt French, I have never heard her speaking it. Indeed, it seems hard to discover sometimes—though her intelligence is frequently quite alarming—what she ever learnt at school. As far as I could make out, she was just driven through the same hoops again and again—though sometimes the shape was slightly altered, which hampered me when I was doing her homework—until honour was satisfied by the mere lapse of time. My pass-book proves that she had nearly eleven years of it, from the first term in Chelsea to the last term in Paris. It also shows that I was contributing to the compulsory education of masses of other children, and I haven't stopped doing that yet. But again I should hate to say what any of them have learnt, and if there were any justice of course I should get a refund. But then there isn't. The racket is a vested interest, strongly supported in its upper branches by snobbery and *laissez-faire*, and by dread of headmasters and headmistresses, which one never entirely

outgrows, and by the advantage which they take of each generation's pathetic hope that its children are being given some kind of chance. We all know that when once we could read and write, and manage the simpler sums, we either learnt nothing more at school or immediately forgot what we had learnt. A great many of us know that as soon as coercion was removed, we again—with what brains were now left to us—began learning a good deal. But that's what I think of schools as a whole; though they do keep the house quieter when an author is trying to work.

Enough. If my sanity continues to be as keen as this, I quite see that I shall be locked up. No more about Mary's education, then—though we hadn't, unfortunately, finished with Anne's. It is much more important to reflect that on Saturday, March 28th, 1936—or on the day following her first visit, with her mother, to the Grand National—she reached the impressive age of seventeen. So we all gave her presents, and in the evening, after the last performance of *Romeo and Juliet*—which of course she attended—we all had another blow-out at the Savoy Grill. Here I discovered that I had arrived without any money, and had to borrow from the heroine of the occasion—who because of it was rather flush—though I paid her back as soon as the bank opened again on Monday. But just look at us to-night. We're being extravagant, and I know it. We've even got Anne with us. And I wish we'd got the dogs. But it's an occasion. It's a milestone. Somehow or other—and the prospect, as I look back at it, makes me absolutely giddy—we have brought up a daughter from the age of absolutely nothing at all, until she's seventeen, and taller than her mother, and has had two terms in Paris, and is on the verge of coming out. I can't get over it. I can't think how we did it. Or I can't think how I contributed my own share, for Diana, as I look back, never seems to have faltered or hesitated once. It was I who had said I should prefer a daughter, but it was she who did everything else. She ought to be given a title and a pension. She ought to have a long, luxurious holiday, with no house-keeping, and breakfast in bed. But of course this is the very last thing that she will be allowed or will allow herself. In fact, the height that we have both reached now reveals an alpine ascent ahead. For daughters didn't come out, in 1936, by the mere waving of a wand.

There was an interlude, on the Monday when I paid my debt to

Mary and wrote another cheque for the oculist. Its origin lay in the fact that while Alan Milne and I had continued to lunch together at our literary-dramatic Club, we had both noticed how other members were occasionally employing a further facility. There were days when women came furtively and nervously up the steps, when they were whisked into a mysterious apartment, and when trays outside it and the sound of discreet revelry from within showed that a mixed lunch-party was going on. So we thought we'd give one, too. We hob-nobbed, we plotted and planned, we engaged the apartment, we interviewed the Steward, and we each issued five invitations, beginning, of course, with our wives. My other guests were Mr. and Mrs. Peter Davies and Mr. and Mrs. Robert Douglas. Alan's were Miss Leonora Corbett, Miss Elizabeth Pollock—who also happened to be Diana's cousin, and to have a married name as well—together with Harry Graham and Roland Pertwee. The Club provided grape-fruit, boiled salmon, saddle of lamb, and a *soufflé surprise*; not to mention drinks and smokes. The mysterious apartment proved closely to resemble a private sitting-room in an old-fashioned, provincial hotel, and was rendered additionally mysterious—and in other circumstances depressing—by a ground-glass window which completely obscured any view. But though both hosts were decidedly apprehensive, they soon rallied, and the guests all played up, too. Once more, in fact, there were sounds of revelry, and a good deal of laughter as well. Sometimes I wondered why on earth we were doing this, and particularly why I was eating so much. But then I began enjoying myself, as I trust the others did, also. The only sadness was that Harry Graham—Alan's guest, but my friend, too—was so obviously far from well. Of course he was witty, of course he was charming, and of course both qualities were enhanced, as always, by their contrast with the firm imprint of the Coldstream Guards. But I was worried about him; and with reason. He had exactly six months to live.

There were no speeches, and still less were there any songs. At about three o'clock, I suppose, the party suddenly disintegrated, leaving me gratified but exhausted, and nothing remained but to pay my own half of the bill. Should we do it again? Yes, of course. But we never did. We meant to, but we were still thinking of it when Harry Graham died; and after that, though we still thought of it, we could never quite screw ourselves up. We wanted the same party, and we



couldn't have it. So we just talked about it for a bit, and then gradually we didn't even do that. The interlude became a memory; and now, of course, one isn't allowed to have a lunch like ours.

On the afternoon of April 1st I sneaked out of Church Street, and Diana had fifty members of her own sex to tea. This was very unusual. In fact, it was quite unprecedented. But there was also much more in it than immediately met the eye. For the guests this time were all mothers and daughters, and though I had no idea myself that we knew as many as fifty, Diana had been quietly planning it, I should say, for several months, and it was the first visible step in a very careful campaign.

If she had planned it just a little more thoroughly, Mary would have been born in the autumn instead of the spring. For girls, unlike battleships, must always be launched in May, and seventeen was a bit young, and eighteen was now thought a bit old, while seventeen and a half was socially correct. However, Diana wasn't going to put it off for a whole year, and there was a distinct sound of trumpets, no doubt, as she and the mothers all put their heads together, as colleagues and rivals in this very important game. As an observer, I sometimes wondered why the girls had got to come out like this at all. Was marriage the object? Was it done for the sake of the band-leaders and big caterers—just as Christmas, as it sometimes seemed now, was really kept going by the shops? Mightn't it make these children, who so far had done nothing at all, attach undue importance to pleasure or develop swollen heads? Or reverting to marriage again—which I still suspected as the ultimate aim—how many boys in ballrooms were capable of supporting brides, or how could they ever hope to do so if they stayed up all night?

I put some of these points, and I was rebuked. Mary was going to dance, I was told, chiefly so as to enjoy herself—which I certainly hoped she would—partly as an extension of her education, and largely (once more) because Diana didn't wish, in after years, to be liable to any form of reproach. As if she could be!

"I see," I said. "But look here," I went on, "if she's going to all these parties"—for already, owing to Diana's industry and ingenuity, our daughter's looking-glass was thickly fringed with cards—"we can't just do our bit by having a few dinners. It's tit for tat in this game, quite obviously, and we'll get a bad name if we don't pay

everything back. Don't you see—if you're going on with this—that we'll have to give a big dance ourselves?"

"Of course," said Diana. "What do you take me for? We're giving one next year."

I shuddered and collapsed. It was Mary's youth, of course, that had bought this momentary respite—for it appeared now that if you came out at seventeen, you had two first seasons instead of one. But of course it wasn't only a respite. It was an ominous threat as well. For two summers now Diana, as a chaperon, would also be up all night. Our dining-room would constantly be full of immature strangers. And eventually there would come an evening when we should be entertaining several hundred of them, at least, elsewhere. But Diana had no mercy. "If you'd had a son," she pointed out, "he'd have cost you far more."

True. I was a curmudgeon, of course. I was a churl. I was a coward. Let the overhead soar, then, let Mary enjoy herself—Anne, too, when her turn came—and let Diana's kindness and generosity be spared my ungrateful attacks. They weren't always, of course. There were elements in the whole business which must necessarily, just every now and then, provoke a novelist to further protests and swift defeats. But now that it's all over, and can never happen again, of course I see that Diana was entirely right. For if we hadn't spent money on those seasons, we should only have had it taken away. And if we had robbed our children of this kind of gaiety, there is nothing with which we could possibly replace it now. Nor has either of them ever reproached us, whatever their criticisms in other directions, for supplying them with so many memories and friends. In many senses it was another racket, of course, and the tit-for-tat was sometimes startlingly frank. But in those days one either had to go right into it or miss something for ever. So Diana worked and toiled in her own department, while I did the same in mine. And in this case we're not asking for the money back, for though we couldn't pay it to the people who had been kind and hospitable to us in our own extreme youth, it was to them, again in a sense, that we were making a belated return.

It was just about this time, also, that on re-entering my house one afternoon, I saw a slip of paper on the door-mat. I assumed it to be some kind of circular—relating, perhaps, to coal, window-cleaning,

or old false teeth—and had picked it up and was on the point of throwing it away, when I suddenly glanced at it, and had rather a shock. For it was by means of this flimsy and unobtrusive document, which hadn't even been put in an envelope, that the London County Council was giving me notice of its intention to change the name of our street. On July 1st of the following year Church Street was to become Old Church Street, and any objections to this ridiculous decision must be sent in without delay.

For of course it was ridiculous, quite apart from the expense to which it would put us in the matter of stationery. Church Street, Chelsea, had been known by this name for at least the best part of three centuries, and though certainly there were other Church Streets in the Metropolitan area, there had never, in my own eleven years, been any instance of confusion—for the simple reason that the suffix was invariably employed. To cab-drivers, shop-assistants, and everybody else, one said, "107, Church Street, Chelsea," and none of them imagined that one meant anything else. Now, if the L.C.C. had its way, the suffix would still be as necessary as before, but a useless syllable would be added and a traditional name would be lost. I might add that at no L.C.C. election had the matter of re-naming streets been mentioned at all.

So again I became a gad-fly, and this time more or less in partnership with the new tenant of the big house where Diana's parents had once lived, whose name, I felt, ought to carry some weight, and who was just as indignant as I was. We not only entered a powerfully-reasoned protest, but we also took the liberty of asking at whose request the change was being made. The L.C.C. replied, after a while, that they were determined now that no two streets in London should have the same name—a policy for which they had no mandate, and which has resulted in the disappearance of hundreds of historical associations, as well as in far more confusion than it has ever removed. And they then rather rashly added that they were doing it at the request of the Borough Councils, the Post Office, and the Fire Brigade.

Our own Borough Council immediately denied this, so did the Post Office, and though we didn't ask the Fire Brigade—because it was controlled by the L.C.C.—I did make one rather good point. I reminded my official correspondent that there was a Fire Station a few yards from Church Street, Chelsea, and another one a few yards

from Church Street, Kensington—which was the nearest thoroughfare with the same name. And I suggested that if the staffs at these two stations were so stupid that they were always attending each other's fires, then they must almost certainly be too stupid to extinguish them when they got there. I also asked my correspondent how he would like it himself if the prefix "Old" were compulsorily added to his own name. This letter wasn't answered for six months, so that I was now left in some suspense. But of course I knew what County Councils thought of ratepayers, and I knew also how ingenious the bureaucracy is at discovering and keeping unnecessary jobs for itself. In fact, I hadn't the slightest hope of halting this imbecile programme. But I resented it. For I couldn't help feeling that an attempt was being made, by alleged public servants, to alter not only the rhythm but the very essence of my own, special address. However, I just stopped short—which was a mistake, no doubt—of circularising the other hundred and ninety-four residents in the street. After all, I had got my own work to do.

Two days after Diana's great tea-party we all went down to Rookington, while waiting for the Season to begin, for the best part of three weeks, and I got out my car again. Its rest, I am afraid, had done it no good, for though every possible precaution had been taken, there is only one thing that really suits a car. And that's steady, regular work, with no chance for the damp to condense in its joints and lungs. It looked all right, and it started all right—which was more than I had really expected—but it was never going to be as quiet or as lively again, though we trundled about in it for another eighteen months.

Mary's post continued to contain a number of further invitations, and a quantity of photographers were now writing to her as well. I suppose they knew their business, and if they charged twelve guineas a dozen they could afford to be lavish with their note-paper and stamps. Yet this was another aspect of the racket that made me think a bit, even when I had the tact or common sense to keep such thoughts to myself. I ought, I kept feeling, in order to satisfy the photographers and Mary, to be at least Major-General Sir Denis Mackail. And I wasn't. In fact, there was no hope of it; however laboriously and conscientiously I might be tackling my own job.

It had been arranged now, also, after another conference with the

oculist, that Anne was to leave her day-school again—where because of her eyes she had only been marking time—and to make a fresh start by sharing a governess with a friend. So this was what she would be doing for a year now, in a house about half a mile away. And often, this summer, she would be playing tennis with the friend as well, and Topsy and Victoria would go with her and look on. She was still learning nothing that she didn't know already—except when, for some inscrutable reason, the governess started teaching her Spanish—but it was a nice house to go to, she wasn't being overworked, and a bit of a rest at that age suits a girl much better than a car. She was still wearing spectacles, of course, but they weren't quite so blinding when I tried them on. And presently she would be allowed to take them off, if she wished to be seen rather than to see.

But now we go back to April 22nd, and to Mary's first real dance. This was to be preceded by a dinner-party at Church Street—where I only knew one of the guests—and other preparations had naturally included a new dress. Also special visits, by the heroine and her mother, to the hairdresser. I seem to have had my hair cut, too, that day, and to have bought a packet of seed for Bully; presumably because Diana was too busy. But I also bought a bouquet for the heroine, which was well received—by sheer luck it was the right size and colour; and then I, too, retired to my room to dress. Full figgery, of course, though I wasn't going to the Ball, and was therefore the very opposite of Cinderella. But the unknown squires would of course be in full figgery too—and were, for you should have seen their buttonholes!—so of course I mustn't disgrace my family; though as matter of fact my dress-coat bore certain signs of age. And was rather tight, I noticed. And the trousers, as always, were covered with Pekingese hair.

However, I brushed them again, descended to the drawing-room, and presently did my best to extend an affable greeting to a succession of young women and young men. I felt about a hundred. The young women seemed hardly aware of my presence. The young men, inevitably, all called me "sir"; after which their eyes, also, became veiled. And Mary, though she was holding my bouquet, didn't appear to know quite who I was. I felt very lonely. When I thought how I should have to sit over the remnants of the banquet with the strange young men, I was frankly terrified.

Presently, though, we all drifted into the dining-room, where the candles had been lit now and Bully had been covered up in his corner, and I toiled like a Titan between two dumb débutantes. I don't think they were afraid of me. It was merely that their rather rudimentary minds were elsewhere, and that they hadn't yet learnt that speech, on these occasions, is expected and should if possible be produced. So I felt depressed. And Diana, even with her own much greater social gifts, was obviously having a hard time of it between two of the white ties.

Then she took the girls away, and the youths, somewhat to my relief, began talking to each other. I gathered that they all had cars, or at any rate drove them, and each of them informed the others how frequently he passed the red lights. In fact, one might say that they boasted of this slightly, though as they all seemed to do it, nobody gained any particular advantage. Occasionally I tried to speak myself, but this seemed to startle them, or else they thought it in bad taste, and I soon dried up again. I plied them with port and cigarettes, which they took simultaneously like all their generation, and they began telling each other how regularly they exceeded the speed-limit, and what they said to policemen who protested. But again I should have said it was a dead heat. And again I was rather glad that my own car was in the country. You must understand, please, that I didn't dislike them; it was merely humiliation that I felt at being unable to get in touch with them in any way. We didn't know each other, there was a gap of well over twenty years between us, and perhaps it was pointless to try and bridge it when I should probably never see any of them again; and almost certainly shouldn't recognize them if I did. So I suffered. And yet I was abased. These are the ones, I was thinking, who will be dragged into the next war. I ought to be doing more for them. I ought to be trying to prevent it. But I can't do either. They'd only think me mad if I mentioned it; and as a matter of fact they probably think that anyhow. Perhaps they're right. But they really are talking the most awful tosh.

Again I gave them my full attention—not that they seemed to notice this, either—and then suddenly Mary was in the doorway, telling us we were all late. So I hustled her away, and I hustled them into the lavatory, and then there was a great efflux from Diana's bedroom, and Diana herself appeared—looking, I thought,

a little tired already—and then in taxis and some of those fabulous cars the whole party sped away. Our maids began clearing the dining-room, and I went upstairs to see Anne and the dogs. I still felt melancholy as I circled the block, setting off, as usual on these nights, with a Peke under each arm. And then Topsy went back to Anne, and I lay awake, with Victoria at my feet, until at last Diana returned, and took her away.

"Was it a success?" I asked.

"I think so," she said.

"Good," I said. "But, look here, I'm afraid I wasn't much help, you know."

Diana began telling me, as she always does, how much the strange creatures had liked me. But I didn't believe her, and after this, I fear, I was more customarily absent than not when one of these dance-dinners came round. They didn't do this every night, of course, and there were still nights when Mary was at home. Occasionally, also, I pulled up my socks, plunged into the vortex, and once more struggled with débutantes and listened to young men as they talked about their conduct on the roads. But my memories are mostly of evenings with Anne, at some restaurant or pot-house round the corner. Or of evenings, not that I enjoyed them particularly, for I was usually more or less alone there, at one of my Clubs. I watched the clock. I came home in an omnibus. Sometimes there was still a row of cars outside our green front door, and in that case I must start circling the block by myself. But presently they would have gone, or I would turn back rapidly just as they were going; and then, dodging the maids who were tidying up the wreckage, I would again collect the dogs. "Come on, Topsy! Come along, Victoria!" And so, once more, to bed.

It was early in May, or a few days after the Italians had entered Addis Ababa, that we all had an old-fashioned evening together at the Chelsea Palace—Mary having a night off for once—and that Diana won a small clock and two vases in a simple competition that consisted of sitting where you were until a spot-light picked you out. This was much more on my own social level, I'm afraid, but there could be few such gatherings just now. Diana's engagement-book, which had once been so simple and intelligible, was crammed with names that meant nothing whatever to me. All for Mary's sake, of

course; all to keep the Terpsichorean pot boiling; all a part of her consecrated and devoted plan. But she was out to lunch—or else five mothers were expected and I must turn out myself—and she was out to tea; she was meeting Mary at a cocktail-party, and if she dined at home I knew that, just as I was going to bed myself, she must put on her finery and go forth to sit patiently on another ball-room bench. Of course she was the real heroine, even though she said she enjoyed it. But I *had* got my work to do, which was impossible after late nights, and I still hated crowds and bad air, and I did contribute to the Terpsichorean expenses.

In the middle of May, moreover, I went to a Ball myself. It was given, for her grandchildren, by that mother of my great friend at Oxford—the one whose other home Diana and I had visited four years ago—so that my own generation as well as Mary's was involved. I danced with my wife, I danced with my daughter, I even danced with a contemporary of the former. And then I saw a ghost, and rushed home. A bad choice, perhaps, for my reintroduction to rhythm on parquet. I didn't tell Mary, but of course Diana understood. And certainly, if I were going to do this again, I must get a new dress-suit. For it wasn't only the ghost that had made me so uncomfortable, now that I was at last a bit nearer the right weight for my length.

There were several week-end recesses at Rooklington this summer, which were supposed to be a rest for Diana, though I don't know that they actually were. During one of them Anne and I drove into Splashcliff on the Sunday morning—as we generally did, so as to get the newspapers at a reasonable time—and were rewarded for our early rising by being among the first to see a steamer stuck on the beach. It was the mildest shipwreck imaginable, for at the next high tide it backed off again, though a fleet of would-be salvagers besieged it all day. Yet it was romantic also, or I thought so. And as a land-lubber I am afraid I always kept hoping, though vainly, that the same thing would happen again.

Mary, in another new dress, at the special evening, for débutantes and charity, known as Queen Charlotte's Ball. This didn't quite rank as a Presentation; but that was coming, for Diana had taken steps here, too. Rooklington again. Chelsea again. My forty-fourth birthday, and dinner with my parents—for of course it was again my mother's birthday too—while Diana, still the victim of her own



devotion and the engagement-book, had ten young people to dinner for yet another dance. Reappearance of the author, two nights later, in the ballroom at Claridge's; where he again suffered, tried hard to conceal it, and suddenly tore off home. Ungrateful clod, but he couldn't help it. For always, as a yawn started seizing him, he must think of his new novel and its twelve hundred words a day.

Nevertheless, it was after this that I definitely ordered a new dress-suit, which at the moment is still in existence, though I last wore it in July, 1939, and I'm much thinner again now. It didn't occur to me that I was tempting Providence, or that again and so soon I was to be cast for the part of Job. I was merely aware of the existing constriction, and was seeking, not unnaturally, to avoid it in future. But as a matter of fact, and so far as the present Season was concerned, I was wasting both money and time.

Meanwhile, I worked; and we dined with J. M. B. again—but his play had been "indefinitely postponed" now, owing to Miss Elisabeth Bergner's illness, and in this phase of patience and disappointment he was clearly in no mood to go on reading it aloud; and we went to another dinner-party, on the next night, at which Diana suddenly lost her voice; and there was another dance-dinner at Church Street, where she was still speechless, but still took more than competent charge.

Then she recovered, or at any rate could talk to us again, and almost immediately she was taking Mary to Ascot. Again I skulked in my study, though I had what is inaccurately termed an alibi, in the shape of a very bad cold. I also supplied the race-goers with some cash for gambling, which they instantly lost. But having seen them in their clothes, I was quite happy—apart from my cold—to be evading this extraordinary jamboree. Top-hats in the country. Why? I'd tried it once, and I'd been miserable. If it comes to that, I had also, on a still earlier occasion, tried it in a soft-hat and rain-coat, on the vulgar side of the course, while Diana was among the toffs in her glory. But those simpler meetings at Lewes were quite enough for me, and whatever else I miss to-day, it certainly isn't Ascot. Mary, however—thanks to her remarkable mother—can look back, if she chooses, to the full pageantry of the whole affair.

Yet another week-end, intended to be revivifying, at Rooklington; for by the best electric train now the whole journey, from door to door, took just under two hours. But it didn't do any of us much

good. The weather was close and thundery, even, for once, at the seaside, and personally I was poisoned by a venomous veal-and-ham pie. I was ill all the week in London, though I was working, too. And was still rather pale on the Friday, when Diana and I set off, by train again, for another week-end at Apperley. It was so long since I had slept in any but my own two beds that I had almost forgotten how to pack. But we arrived, and Peter Davies and his wife were there too, and there was a pleasant evening all round. On the Saturday afternoon we were all to go over to a Fête in the garden at Stanway, which was to be opened—though he was a guest there himself now—by J. M. B. The morning was gloriously hot and fine, and we were all reclining on a shady part of the lawn, when Diana was suddenly summoned to the telephone. Our parlourmaid had rung up from Church Street to say that Mary had been in a motor accident the night before, on her way back from a dance, had been taken to St. Luke's Hospital with cuts and concussion, but was now being sent home.

So Diana came out and told me this, and I was decidedly disturbed. But when we asked about trains, it seemed that there was none that was the slightest use until about tea-time; so that all we could do was to wait, and have lunch, and go to the Fête—where we arrived too late for the inaugural address, but each received a characteristic and mysterious nod from the orator. And then we were whisked to Cheltenham, and reached home in time for dinner. We had had, in fact, a very short week-end visit indeed.

Mary was in bed, in the dark, with a bandage on her nose. Her own doctor had confirmed that she was suffering from concussion, and presently we heard—for she could remember little or nothing herself—that she had been in a car with her special friend and two young men. And that the driver—though stimulated by nothing but lemonade—had attempted to shoot across the Fulham Road, under the impression that it was a side-street, and that the back part of the car had been struck by another one proceeding along the main thoroughfare. It was my opinion, as a motorist, that the driver was in the wrong. But the crash had come; he had got off scot-free; the girl beside him had escaped with slight cuts and bruises; the other young man would be in hospital for several weeks now; and Mary, with her curtains drawn and a doctor in attendance—and pledged, in a sense, to parade before His Majesty in just over three

weeks—had finished her first Season on the night of the 27th of June.

She still has the scar. There can be no question that concussion and a shock like that are something that part of one never gets over. It wasn't really necessary, I thought, that a girl of this age—however much she was enjoying herself as a temporary butterfly—should suddenly be banged on the head and taken to a public ward. One didn't expect this sort of thing in the summer of 1936, however normal and commonplace it may have become since then. But Diana and I must control our feelings; and when the driver came to call on his victim we were both exceedingly polite to him, and neither of us suggested that cars shooting out of side streets should look before they leap.

Furthermore, we were quite prepared to pay all the medical and other expenses ourselves, though it hadn't yet occurred to me that there was any other course. Suddenly, however, the driver's insurance company wrote a letter of such an ambiguous and non-committal nature that, not knowing how on earth to answer it, I sent it on to my solicitor. This admirable character—who only a fortnight ago had got the last cheque out of my tenant—told me that of course I must claim for all our expenses, and that Mary was entitled to compensation as well. So in the end—entirely owing to the insurance company's excessive caution—I wasn't out of pocket, Mary's blood-stained clothes (and other belongings which had apparently been snaffled by a spectator) were replaced, and she was given a cheque for £50; part of which she banked, for the time being, and with part of which she purchased a fur coat. This did her a lot of good—though of course I would have given her two fur coats, if by doing so I could have avoided the accident—and presently she would be able to go out in a car again without refusing to occupy one particular seat.

But not yet. And she was still very much in bed and in the dark on July 1st, when Diana and I were to lunch with her godfather, who was also my Best Man. As he lives in Scotland, we see him regrettably seldom. But in those days he generally flashed through London at that time of year, and never forgot us when he did. So we were just starting out, at the end of my morning's work, and in point of fact I was just opening the green front door—when there was a thud behind me, and I realized that Diana had had another of her falls. Again I was terrified, and probably appeared angry; but as

I helped her up, she turned dead white. "I think," she said, "I've broken my wrist."

I rushed her in a taxi to her doctor, two miles away. The doctor—who was a female doctor, but I can't keep on saying this, or calling her a doctress—was fortunately at home, but wouldn't commit herself to a definite statement until the wrist had been X-rayed. And that couldn't be, it seemed, until the middle of the afternoon. Meanwhile, I had telephoned to the Best Man, who of course said that he wouldn't expect us. But Diana now said that she was feeling better, that she couldn't do nothing until half-past three, and that we would go to the lunch after all. So we went; and if she were in one kind of agony, I was in another, though no one, as usual, could have been kinder than my Best Man. Then we drove up to Harley Street, and she was photographed, and we were told to wait while the plates were developed, so as to be quite certain, I suppose, that they hadn't been cracked or fogged. Presently we were told that they were all right, and naturally I inquired—without asking for any more details—if the wrist were broken or not. The radiologist's secretary, who had just accepted my cheque for three guineas, assumed an air of indescribable primness and reserve. "I'm afraid we can't possibly tell you that," she said. "We can only report to your doctor."

Etiquette. My God! One glance at the first plate must have revealed the truth, and one word could have spared us nearly three more hours of hideous anxiety and uncertainty. But no; we mustn't trespass, professional knowledge was sacred, and professional status was involved. Blast the radiologist and his secretary! It was between six and seven when the doctor arrived at Church Street, and we heard at last that there was a double, impacted fracture, and that a surgeon and anæsthetist were coming along to tackle the next stage. I walked up and down. I telephoned. I suppose I had some dinner. I walked up and down again. I rushed to the front door.

Complete, unescapable nightmare. Eventually a glimpse of Diana, with a heavy, plaster-of-Paris cylinder on her left wrist and forearm. We had a nurse in the house, anyhow, which possibly saved me one telephone-call. But there were two serious cases of illness, and with a final plunge to the lowest figure of all, it is at this point that the mystical symbols in my account-book break off. I was much too unhappy to go on recording my unhappiness. Two blows like that within four days had exhausted this form of expression. I lay awake

for hours that night, while Victoria slept. It seemed almost impossible to doubt that we had fallen under a curse.

But I still went on writing, and still—more than ever, in fact—I circled the block, or potted round other by-streets, with our two Pekes. Presently Mary and Diana were both moving about again, the one with a perpetual headache, and the other with a sling supporting the plaster of Paris, and perpetual pain as well. Presently, also, the nurse left, and there was a gleam, perhaps, of returning dawn.

But it was hardly a steady one. On July 19th—which was the day after the outbreak of civil war in Spain—poor Mary developed an abscess in her ear, and another nurse came in. The next day it began yielding to treatment. And on July 21st Diana, though still in a good deal more than discomfort herself, decided to go through with the Presentation after all. She was right, of course, for Presentations aren't something that happens automatically, or can be postponed lightly; still she was determined that there should be no subsequent reproaches; and the doctor not only gave permission, but backed her up. So a car was hired, and the two invalids dressed up, and off they went to Buckingham Palace, where the bachelor Monarch had arranged to review the *débutantes* at an afternoon party in the garden. They were marshalled in a pen. They were released one by one, and sent forth in Indian file towards a small tent, before which each was to curtsy in turn. But this process had barely got going, when Nature began weeping, or in other words it started to rain. So the Monarch left his little tent, three-quarters of the *débutantes* were never actually presented at all—though they were told afterwards that their attempt would be treated as a technical achievement—and the whole company did their best to withdraw. Mary, however, had had her name shouted, and had received a Royal glance, so that now, I suppose, she was no longer a *débutante*, though I don't quite know what she had become. A *débutée*? There isn't such a word; nor could I truthfully feel that she was either more or less of a lady than she had been before. But she'd done it. Or Diana had done it for her. And now they must both go back and sign their names in a book, and if Mary behaved herself with reasonable circumspection, and if Courts were still being held when she had a seventeen-year-old daughter of her own, she could present this as yet rather mythical creature in turn. I think, in consideration of her

own head and Diana's wrist, that both of them should have been given medals. But they weren't. Nor did any intimation reach me that I had been raised to the peerage myself.

On the following day the surgeon came back—exactly three weeks after his first appearance—to remove the plaster-of-Paris cylinder. Nobody had told Diana that she would now have more pain than she had had since the beginning, or that she would continue to feel it, off and on, for the rest of her life. But she was ordered a course of massage, which would occupy some weeks, and that night—our last for the time being in London—we had a quiet dinner together at what had now become another rather favourite spot. The restaurant in what used to be called the South-Eastern part of Victoria Station. I first knew it when I was in one of my offices, and couldn't really afford to go there, and frequently couldn't get a seat when I did. But that was at lunch-time, of course, and in the evenings it was delightfully uncrowded, and at a table over the arrival platforms we each had a superb steak. Signal-lights flickered, trains drew in, or—a little further away—pulled out. Nothing like the rush or congestion of the Brighton line next door. A scene that soothed, and brought romantic thoughts and memories of the Continent. Anne and I knew it well, for we had dined here several times when the dance-dinners were being held at home. But I think this was Diana's first visit, and though she had naturally been suspicious of the sound of the place, she fully appreciated its rare qualities now. To have a really good meal at a comfortable station restaurant when you haven't got to catch a train yourself. That was psychological as well as gastronomical luxury. And we should be coming here again.

All to Rooklington next day, for a rest, we hoped, at the end of a pretty exhausting month. Mary must still be watched and kept quiet, Diana must be taken into Splashcliff for her daily massage, and I must still work for one more week, or until it was actually August. Always at this season now there was a Territorial camp at Splashcliff. Troops came and went, and marched past our house, singing—with rather pathetic punctilio—the songs of the last war. They also left the farmer's gates open, drove lorries at an alarming pace on the wrong side of the road, and on this occasion used our quiet little village as a place for practising the bugle. Hour after hour these music-lessons went on. I suddenly wrote to the Commanding

Officer, telling him, ingeniously and disingenuously, that my daughter was suffering from the effects of concussion, and though he never answered me, the bugles stopped. So perhaps it was a coincidence. Perhaps—and certainly, according to subsequent standards—I was being unpatriotic. But thanks to this daring or impertinent action I just managed to finish the first draft of *Jacinth* by the end of the month.

So Diana and Mary and I went to Goodwood, which was damnably expensive and tired us all out. And then my holiday began. No bathing, though, for it was still raining and blowing, and the first fine day didn't come until a fortnight later, by which time we had all spent a week at Hillside, too. And then Mary went off to Yorkshire. And then I did something of which I am rather ashamed. An advertising agency wrote to me on behalf of a firm engaged in the manufacture of arm-chairs, and said that if I would be photographed sitting in one of them, I should be given a free sample as a reward. I showed the letter to Diana, and laughed sneeringly. Diana said: "But we could do with another arm-chair." And the next thing was that I had accepted the offer, and was going up to London with Anne. I then went to a commercial photographer's studio—where I was fascinated to see a number of well-known domestic backgrounds, including (for this was what advertising was now coming to) a bathroom with a pipeless bath—and was introduced to the chair. Of course if the agency had known how tall I was, they would certainly have chosen someone else. And of course if I had known that I was to be asked to write a testimonial as well, I doubt if I should have turned up. However, the photographer rammed me against the further arm—so that I looked a bit smaller, and the chair a bit larger—and presently (for of course having gone as far as this, it was impossible to declare my principles) my name and portrait and a slightly equivocal letter appeared all over the Press. For some months, also—until my place was taken (*jamais deux sans trois*) by Miss Cicely Courtneidge—I suffered from a strange mixture of embarrassment and pride. It was clear that I had made a number of my colleagues jealous—even though the advertisement had had to explain that I was the Famous Author—but it was also clear to me that I could no longer pose as somebody above all this. Perhaps I had stooped, then. Perhaps—it was just conceivable—I had climbed. But, anyhow, Diana didn't seem the least disturbed; no

other advertiser suggested that I should sit in the bath; and we've still got the chair.

So that was that, and Anne and I lunched at a restaurant, and went to another conjuring matinée—the Great Dante, who had the last season, before it was pulled down, at the Alhambra—and caught the train back to Lewes, and drove safely home. On the following afternoon Diana presented the prizes at the Rooklington Produce Show, and then we all started basking and bathing again. I lay on the lawn, I potted round the garden—but the Michaelmas daisies were appearing already—I went into Eastbourne and Brighton, I took the dogs (and Charles, nearly always, for the first fifty yards) on their simple and familiar walks. I drifted in to the Darlingsons' and the Hugheses', or we called on Diana's aunts. Yet August was ending, though in a blaze of glory, and on September 1st—when Mary returned, looking much better at last, from Yorkshire—I sat down to the short stories at my desk again.

The weather sympathized, and there was no more bathing, but we still stayed at Rooklington for three more weeks. In the middle of the month *Back Again* was published, and though I was now in a position where reviewers must always temper their praise with blame—but I, like my present successors, had had far too much praise at the beginning—it wasn't so badly received. For some reason the publishers had had my name printed at the top of every right-hand page, which I thought was overdoing it, and an expensive and distinguished artist had designed a jacket in which the narrator was represented in a rather unflattering light. But I don't pretend that these details stopped *Back Again* from breaking all records. It had its fair chance with the other five-thousand-odd novels that were published that year, and it did considerably better than most.

At this point, also, Diana suddenly decided to let Rooklington House, for about six months, to Peggy Hughes's brother-in-law, who wanted to be in the district because his children were at school here. I thought, inevitably, of our last let; but we'd been spending a lot of money, I had always rather wished that our country house could vanish during the winter, and the brother-in-law and his wife were obviously about as different from my Church Street tenant as it was possible to be. So it was all fixed up, without any agent, or inventory, or agreement, and they were to come in on the first of October, to go out again, at their own request, for about ten days at



Christmas, and then to return for another three months. Apart from the fact that their small poodle did a certain amount of minor damage to the paintwork, they couldn't possibly have given less trouble or taken more care. The moral seems to be to avoid agents; though as we never let either house again, it might be rash, perhaps, to generalize. Anyhow, it was a success for both parties, our own overhead was appreciably lightened, the donkeys and garden were both well looked after, and for six months—since we didn't even go down for Christmas—we were back in the comfortable position, during this half of the year, of having no country seat at all. Yes, even if the Rooklington pipes burst now, it had nothing to do with us.

So we tidied and packed, and I laid up the car again, and by the end of September we were all back in Chelsea, and once more telephoning to our London friends. It was during the few days that I was alone there, while the rest of my family were again at Hill-side that I suddenly bought a miniature billiard-table, and installed it in the schoolroom. It was the kind that is supposed to Keep Your Boys at Home; but as I hadn't got any boys, I forced Anne to play with me as soon as she returned. She liked it at first, but then she discovered that I always won—which was entirely due to superior strength, for the balls were far too light for any real skill to be employed—and after that, though there was a slight revival when I bought some more balls and we played Russian Pool, I am afraid it rather languished. Its ultimate fate, which it shared with the Rooklington ping-pong table and outfit, was to be given to the Armed Forces.

October. Anne off to her governess again. Another moderately encouragingly report from the oculist. Mary with plenty of engagements, including quite a number of autumn dances. A night out with the Milnes. A night out by ourselves—all four of us, I mean—at Drury Lane, where Dot was dancing and singing at the top of her form in *Careless Rapture*. And on Sunday, October 11th, the last evening with J. M. B. He had asked us to the flat, but then a telephone message had told us to come to the Berkeley Grill instead, and it was there that we met and parted. He seemed well, I thought. Very little coughing, and all the old enjoyment—which I had first encountered perhaps twenty-five years ago—in this kind of scene. There was a slight look of disgust when a waiter came forward and

addressed him as "Mr. Barrie." But personally I was touched, and was again reminded of the even more distant past, though of course I knew better than to make any allusion to the mistake. In just over a week the rehearsals of his play were to start again, and there was an undercurrent of bubbling excitement behind the weary expression and majestic brow. He wanted to talk about it, and he did talk about it, and we both egged him on. I can't remember any pauses or silences that evening. He was at his very best and sweetest, and the time seemed to rush by. But of course we couldn't stay here for ever, and I had a watch, and I knew what his health was really like and that we mustn't keep him too late. So presently we were saying good-bye again, and his arm came sweeping round to clasp our hands. Two taxis took us in opposite directions; but though there were more letters, and one more tragic glimpse, I never spoke to him again. If I had known this— But what could I have done if I *had* known it? I couldn't have told him that I was going to write his biography, because I didn't know this, either. I couldn't have said anything—for didn't he specialize in producing inadequacy in others? I could only have thought, and remembered, and gone home in silence, instead of talking to Diana in the cab. Of course, I wondered, for one always did now, how much longer these meetings would be sanctioned by Fate. But the destiny of *The Boy David* was still hidden from all of us, with all its aftermath of sadness, and more illness, and death. So that we talked about him in the taxi without any consciousness of approaching tragedy; and presently, no doubt, I was again chanting my own version of a song to which we had once waltzed—long, as they say, before Mary was either born or thought of.

"I know," I sang, gently, "of four brown eyes, waiting for me." As I opened the front door, they came rushing down the stairs to meet us and welcome us. We took little Topsy and Victoria up Mallord Street once more. And then we all went to bed.

I see that it was on the next afternoon that I stood in a queue, for once, at the Science Museum in Exhibition Road, to witness a demonstration of television for the first time. This was still the phase when two rival systems were being tested, and I can't tell you which I saw. But it worked. And I was thrilled. Shortly afterwards there were demonstrations at a number of shops, and again I entered their

darkened cabinets, and was hideously tempted to add television to the other amenities at Church Street. Caution and experience both advised me that, whatever the shops said now, the price was bound to come down. Diana, on the other hand, was quite positive that I should be wasting my money, and equally definite in her objection to any further scientific apparatus in her pretty drawing-room. Should I have it in my study, then? I hesitated. I went on hesitating, and other expenses still soared. So I was firm in the end, and much as I regretted that I was no longer a pioneer, of course if I had taken the plunge I should only now possess—assuming it to have survived my piano—a contraption that would be no use at all. For the war killed television even before it killed anyone else. And again Diana had been right.

As a variation in autumn illnesses this year, I suddenly became crippled with lumbago—which is incurable, but in the end usually cures itself—and poor Mary was ordered into a nursing-home by the dentist, where he succeeded in removing two wisdom teeth. This, of course, reminded me that I had better go and see him myself. So I did. He kept me nearly an hour in his little waiting-room—for he was bad about this, but one never dares threaten a dentist—and for once I had an extremely interesting time there. No, it wasn't that there was any improvement in his selection of periodicals, but a woman was shown in on top of me—if you see what I mean—and almost immediately she began telling me the story of her life. As she had once been a successful actress and had subsequently had a storm-tossed marriage—during the course of which as well as giving birth to twins in an air-raid she had shot into another and still more imposing branch of public life—there was no lack of material, and she did full justice to it. Scheherazade as an autobiographer. I was fascinated. I felt and exhibited both pity and terror as the remarkable recital went on, and indeed it even served as a kind of anodyne when at last my turn came in the fatal chair. She never told me her name, though I think I guessed it; there seemed no reason why I should tell her mine; and we have never met again from that day to this. But if dentists could always provide an entertainment like this, how very differently one would feel towards them. Alas, they don't. A few mouldering and obsolete weeklies are much more their notion of a prelude to probe and drill. But again, of course, one is far too much frightened to complain.

November, now. Suddenly I switched off the short stories, started knocking *Jacinth* into shape, and simultaneously began making notes for a novel that was to be called *Morning, Noon and Night*. I knew, of course—who doesn't, if he has ever listened to a concert on a pier?—that there was a well-known overture of this name, so that presumably there had been an opera as well. But I couldn't help this, I couldn't imagine that there would be any real confusion, and I could think of no other title for my scenario. Morning was to be childhood and youth; Noon was to be the warm-blooded and still resilient thirties; Night, introduced by the twilight of old age, was to stand for extinction and death. Three inter-related plots, in other words, with the scene again set in London and the company still drawn from characters of my own class. But I had never killed a leading character before, and hardly ever had I written, as I was proposing to do now, of liars, and gold-diggers, and cads. Not that there weren't going to be normal and even admirable people too. But the story, or my own mood, or my own age, had demanded this innovation. And perhaps nobody would notice it, or perhaps I should alienate my faithful readers; but from the first moment it was too late to turn vice into virtue, and the experiment had got to go on. So with one hand, as it were, I was making my débutante gayer and more innocent than ever; but with the other I was for once being sinister and even cruel. Furthermore, I was tired, and my lumbago kept coming back—so that suddenly I had to yell for somebody to pull me out of a chair; but still I knew that I only knocked off in August, and hadn't the courage or intelligence to knock off now.

Odd incident in the middle of November. Diana and I were again dining at the restaurant at Victoria—while Mary went off to the Opera—and after we had finished, we again strolled to the nearest bus-stop, and climbed to the top of a Number 11 bus. Presently I was aware—as one is, in these circumstances—that the conductor was approaching us from behind, and without turning my head I held up four pennies and said: "Two twopennies, please." To my utter astonishment a voice replied: "Very good, Mr. Mackail"; and I shot round with a gasp, for only in a dream, surely, would a conductor address one like this. I had another idea that some friend was playing the fool. I may even have remembered, in that split second, how

Ernest Thesiger had once come up behind us in an omnibus and nearly got away with my pennies by his brilliant imitation of a conductor saying "Any more fares, please," in approximately two syllables. But this conductor wasn't Ernest Thesiger. Nor, I was practically convinced, was I asleep. I stared at him. "Don't you remember me, sir?" he said. "I used to be a waiter at the Buskin."

He didn't really say "Buskin," of course, but as I seem to have been so discreet about the names of my Clubs, perhaps I'd better keep it up. And the announcement—whatever the actual name of the literary-dramatic one may have been—was certainly amazing.

"Good heavens!" I said. "Yes, of course!" And suddenly there was a kind of echo, for the waiters there always said "Very good, Mr. Mackail," when I placed my order for lunch. "What——" I began. "Why—— How——"

He told me, as he punched our tickets, that a doctor had advised him to take an open-air job—lungs, I suppose, poor chap—and that he had accordingly chosen this.

"Do you like it?" I asked; for indeed it was a revolutionary change.

"Yes, thank you, Mr. Mackail," he said, brightly; and resumed his duties, and disappeared. When we came down the steps again, he ushered us off the vehicle with something in the nature of an obeisance, and we parted with an almost affectionate Good-night. As the bus rolled away, I was still staggered by the fantastic metamorphosis, for somehow one always looked on club-waiters as utterly consecrated to their calling; and conductors, if it comes to that, as equally pledged to a lifetime in their own caste. Yet presently I was provided with scarcely less remarkable evidence of the oddness of the real truth. For one day I couldn't get any waiter to come near me at all at this same Club, and having starved and suffered for a long time, I finally mentioned my condition to the Secretary.

"I'm sorry," he said, courteously; "but we're a bit short-handed this week. You see, three of our waiters have just left us and gone to sea."

Now, in fiction one isn't allowed to be nearly as improbable as that.

It was about ten days later that the London County Council at last answered my letter of the previous April, told me that they had received only eight objections to the re-naming of Church Street, and added—in some well-rounded periods—that they were now

inflexibly resolved to call it "Oldchurch Street." This, of course, wasn't the name of the original notice, as I naturally pointed out. I also pointed out that "Oldchurch" was virtually unpronounceable, and took the opportunity of asking how many residents had expressed their approval of the change. This latter inquiry received no reply—the truth being, I should imagine, that the vast majority of residents were still unaware that they had been circularized at all—but as the Borough Council now also protested vigorously against "Oldchurch," the earlier version was revived. We were all now to find ourselves in Old Church Street on the first of next July—and you should have heard what the taxi-drivers thought of this and all the other alterations for which they, too, had never asked. But the L.C.C. had shown its power, and there was nothing more that I could do. Except, of course, to brace myself for the inevitable confusion and expense.

On the last night of November, when the pain in my back was rather bad again, we suddenly heard the bells of fire-engines; and though this was quite a familiar sound—owing to the Fire-Station being so near—something made us go to the door and look out. What we saw there made up go rushing—or in my own case hobbling—up to Mary's bedroom windows, and from here we saw what I am forced to describe as a great, red glow in the southern sky. We stared, we speculated; and then the wireless told us the truth. The Crystal Palace was burning furiously, and in the strong north-west wind that was blowing all hope of saving it had already been abandoned. I shouldn't, I suddenly realized, be able to write an article on its centenary at all.

"Awful," says Diana, in her engagement-book; and awful it was. Again and again we looked out, and presently the glare began dying down; but the morning newspapers made it quite clear that we should never see that familiar outline again. All my life it had been the test by which Londoners had boasted of their views. "In clear weather," they would say—even though it seldom seemed to be clear when they said it—"we can see the Crystal Palace distinctly." And all my life, though I had actually entered it perhaps four or five times, to me, for some reason, it had represented the very acme of romance. Now it was gone—there were dreadful photographs in the evening papers, though in less than four years charred wreckage would hardly draw more than 'a glance—and I knew well enough what little

likelihood there was that it would ever be raised again. I trembled. I considered it extremely ominous. And I wasn't the least surprised when, two days later, the whole Press came out with a story which it had been bottling-up for months.

A bishop, you may remember, pulled the cork out; and though afterwards he said that he had been alluding to something else, there was no getting it in again now. At Diana's great Fork Lunch for débutantes on December 3rd—so called, in those days, because they all stood up (though I wasn't there to see them) and loaded their own plates—nothing else was discussed. Rumours. Constant accounts of the Prime Minister's visits to Fort Belvedere. More rumours. Opinion hardening, at first in the more puritan provinces, and then in London, too. Christmas shopping virtually suspended—though it was in the very middle of the crisis that I suddenly bought a Shove-Ha'penny board—while everyone waited for the next edition of the newspapers or the next words from a loud-speaker. Then came the final announcement in the House of Commons; the final broadcast from the mysterious Fort Belvedere itself; and on Saturday, December 12th, the proclamation—echoing the full formality of barely eleven months ago—of His Majesty King George VI.

Another omen, if I were right; and I most certainly was. Edward for peace, and George for war. Now we were in for it; or we should be—not when we were ready, of course, for England was never ready—but as soon as somebody, corresponding to that bishop, either purposely or accidentally pulled out another cork. So I prayed. But I must have lacked faith or something, for though my lumbago was undoubtedly wafted away by this public form of counter-irritant, looking back now one can hardly see a single pause on the rest of the slippery slope. We *were* in for it, and no one was going to have the wits to keep us out of it. The ghastly object-lesson that no one should have forgotten, the clearest possible evidence in all adult living memories that wars can no longer be won, would mean nothing when set against the incorrigible human impulse among men in power to get into a mess, and then seek to gamble their way out. One might look away, and in this country we nearly all did at times. But the omens wouldn't be cheated, and the men in power—however often they might shift from one post to another—either couldn't or wouldn't change. I knew this. I also knew that I shouldn't be in power myself, and may even have suspected that if I were, I

should behave just like everyone else. But I was neither hopeful nor happy, and Diana was ill again—though with fatigue, I think, this time, more than anything else—so that it was Mary who accompanied me to the first night of *The Boy David*, at His Majesty's Theatre, on the evening of Monday, December 14th.

Our presence was accidental, in a sense, for knowing what a rush there would be, and also that special prices were being charged, I had proposed to wait a day or two; and should have saved about twenty-four shillings if I had. But suddenly it seemed that I had been put on the list, and as it would have been ungrateful and ungracious to slide off it again, I posted a cheque—which would have taken the whole family to any other play—and Mary and I dressed up and set forth. We sat far back in the stalls—in fact, I think we should have been in the pit, if they hadn't abolished it—and goggled with some interest, as notabilities entered and some of them received rounds of applause. Presently, for instance, we were much stimulated by a vision of Miss Marlene Dietrich; and so, it seemed, was the rest of the house. Then I gathered, though there was still a good deal of chatter and uproar, that some kind of overture was being played. And then the curtain rose, and there was the scene that the author had described to me over a year ago. We watched, we listened, and all the time I could feel the temperature dropping. I thought of the author again, too ill this evening to leave his flat, and was anxious. I was still more anxious during the second Act; and during the subsequent interval, as Mary and I exhibited ourselves in the foyer, we saw several members of the audience slipping out. We went back, and there was a gap just in front of us now, so that it was the third Act that I actually saw best. But the house had become an ice-house, and though we both clapped vigorously at the final curtain—as also, no doubt, did others in the same tormented frame of mind—there was only perfunctory support. The people at the sides of the stalls were clearing out already, and in a few minutes, I imagined, would be spreading the tale of disaster and disappointment elsewhere. There had been no hitches, no lack of rehearsals, and up in Edinburgh during the past fortnight *The Boy David* had been an almost unqualified success. But London had instantly decided that it was dull, and no play could have seemed anything else with a reception and in an atmosphere like that. I saw it myself again, in the company of an ordinary audience, and this



time the magic worked. My daughter Anne went quite mad about it, and treated it like *Romeo and Juliet* for the rest of its short run. But it never got over that first performance, and all the misfortunes that it had suffered long before that. It was doomed from that moment, and so was the author who had lost with his last throw.

I wanted to go home at once now, but I couldn't, for there was a kind of cloudburst in the Haymarket, and we couldn't even get near the doors. So we returned to a corridor, where we fell in with Peter and Nico Llewelyn Davies and their wives, and we all looked at each other, and were wretched, and didn't say so, and were thinking of the author and of what he must still face from the Press. A ghastly evening, though at our second attempt we did manage to fight our almost saturated way into a taxi. Then we drove back to Chelsea, and almost at once—though I am not attributing them to *The Boy David* too—I developed fresh symptoms of ill-health. And Diana was still exhausted, though she was still being a house-keeper and a débutante's mother with every ounce of her strength. On Christmas Eve Anne went down with influenza, which again did her mother no good; and though we visited our respective parents on Christmas Day, Diana then went to bed. I was ill, too, though I was obstinate about having a doctor. It was almost like the end of last year.

We all rallied at moments. Anne, having shot up to 103, started recovering. On Boxing Day the rest of us went to a rather poor pantomime—or so it seemed to me—and in the evening my cousin Di and her husband came to dinner, and we played Shove-Ha'penny and the piano, and laughed. Then Mary collapsed with a bad cold. And I *would* go on working, and was getting into the most awful mess. We had made no plans for New Year's Eve, though Mary, who should really have been in bed still, suddenly joined a party for the Chelsea Arts Ball. And then Douglas rang up, and Diana and I went to a film with him, and we all went back to the doll's-house afterwards, collecting little Dorothy from her theatre on the way. So it was here, in the midst of much kindness and warm-heartedness, that we heard the bells and hooters, and all wished each other a happy new year. I don't know what Douglas and little Dorothy were thinking of, but personally I was looking back rather than forward, as I thought of the three Kings in one twelve-month, and of Diana's wrist, and of Mary's concussion, and Anne's eyes,

and of the mess that I was in with my work. If we were going to have another year like that, I would much rather not look forward; for in addition to all these old anxieties I wasn't at all satisfied with the what one might call World Affairs. I haven't mentioned them much in this part of the record, but whenever one looked at them one looked in vain for reason, or tolerance, or any kind of plan. War in Spain. An unhappy peace in Abyssinia. Threats from Germany. Coolness, to say the least of it, from Italy. Trouble brewing in the Far East. Trouble, as always now, in India, and in Ireland. And doubts, again to say the least of it, about the situation in France. Where was the voice, in this country, that could lead us either to effective isolation, with the power to make it possible, or to an understanding with the other countries that were so obviously twisting our tail? I don't think it was too late at the end of 1936; or not, if, even at this point, a few men's hearts had been changed. But they weren't. The Foreign Office was still blind, deaf, and provocative. The newspapers still used their vast influence for dangerous and impromptu purposes of their own. The B. B. C., though perhaps it hadn't yet abandoned its motto of "Nation shall speak Peace unto Nation," did little or nothing to make this dream come true. The Government, and the bulk of its more blameless victims, still seemed quite unaware that everyone—apart from those who were making this perfectly clear—didn't necessarily love us, and look up to us, and take it for granted that we were always in the right. Anything could surprise a Government like that, and a lot of things did. But there it was, and as so many voices were already asking, whom could one put in its place? There was no answer. For whether they had all been killed in the last war or not, there were no realists in this country with the faintest shadow of authority; while in the country which we were again being steadily encouraged to regard as our chief enemy, there were no realists now who were working for peace. A bad business. A dark outlook. Yet what, once more, when reason was already beginning to be regarded as treason, could a solitary writer of fiction possibly do by himself? Stick to his own job, perhaps, pay his bills and taxes, look after his family, and pray.

So I thought these things, and I made little Dorothy laugh again—for still, it seemed, I could do that—and then Douglas very kindly drove us back to Church Street, and the dogs came rushing to meet us, and it was Coronation Year.

## CHAPTER XI

1937

AGAIN there are two illustrations in the account-book. One, taken from *The Times*, of J. M. B. in the corner of his big fireplace, which I must have pasted in about six months later. And the other, from *Lilliput*, showing a man buying an evening paper from a news-vendor with two placards on display. The *Evening News* says: "Franco Wins Big Victory." The *Star* announces: "Franco's Men Still On The Run." The news-vendor's expression is decidedly non-committal, though he is watching the purchaser closely. And this, of course, was how we were in fact supplied with information about that great and horrible dress-rehearsal during this year, and next year, and until suddenly it was all over—for the main production was now almost ready—in the spring of 1939.

But at the very beginning of 1937 I was thinking, I am afraid, a good deal about myself. I felt so ill; my twelve hundred words, though still scrupulously and painfully turned out, were going almost straight into the waste-paper basket, day after day; and as if this situation weren't aggravating enough, a rain-water pipe began leaking through my study wall, and men came and banged and hammered as I still went on struggling with *Morning, Noon and Night*. Diana was naturally suggesting that I should call in the doctor—a male doctor in this case—whom I had inherited from E. B. Turner; but I was still unable to describe my own symptoms, so that I didn't quite see what I was to tell him if he came. And I was stubborn. And I felt—which was no doubt another symptom—that if only I could work harder than ever, then something would click inside me, and I should start getting all right.

It was another jury-summons that finally brought me to my senses. I realized that if I were to attend the King's Bench on January 25th, I should probably go mad in the box, and that whether this actually happened or not, I just couldn't have it hanging over me while the best part of three weeks went by. So I rang up the doctor—or did I get Diana to do even this for me?—and was still writing on the morning of Monday, January 11th, when the parlourmaid ushered him

in. I put down my pen, I got up and shook hands with him, he hung on to my pulse, and gazed penetratingly at my eyes. This, so far as I can remember, was the end of his examination, but the diagnosis wasn't delayed. He said that I was overworking—at which I was both frightened and flattered. And he said: "You've got to realize that you're not as young as you were."

At this I was frightened and indignant. Surely forty-four and a half couldn't be as serious as all that. Yet I was trembling, for his first statement hadn't only given me a shock, but had suddenly seemed to open an avenue of release as well.

"Do you mean," I asked, "that I—I ought to knock off for a bit?"

Five minutes ago I had merely regarded his visit as a tiresome interruption, and had had every intention of continuing the struggle the very moment that he left. But now, as I glanced at my desk, I knew that I could no more finish even the sentence that I had been writing than I could soar out through the window and fly to the moon. I sat down, rather abruptly, in a chair.

The doctor was telling me that work was quite out of the question. He said something about a breakdown, and I rather wanted to cry. But I didn't.

"I—I've had a jury-summons—" I began.

"Nonsense," said the doctor. "I'll deal with that."

I felt much better again.

"But what am I to *do*?" I asked.

"Rest," said the doctor. "Take it easy. You've got to put all thought of work right out of your mind."

I smiled faintly and sadly, for of course I knew this was impossible. But it was marvellous to be told to do it, all the same.

"Anything else?" I inquired. "Wouldn't you like to give me some medicine?"

The doctor said he was going to have done that anyhow.

"Oh," I said. "Thank you. Well, look here, the last time I felt rather like this—I think it was about ten years ago—Mr. Turner gave me some injections, and I never stopped work at all. I mean," I rambled, "that I changed over to something else, but——"

"Well, you're not going to this time," said the doctor. "You're ten years older."

I wished he wouldn't keep bringing that up.

"But I know those injections," he said, "and I'll give them you, too."

I thanked him. I felt very cunning, for though I had broken down completely in the middle of *The Flower Show*, I had instantly switched over to short stories, and about six months later had finished it with practically no difficulty at all. But it seemed that my expression was a little too transparent.

"You're *not* to work, I tell you," said the doctor. "Why don't you go off abroad?"

Because I didn't want to, because I wasn't going alone, because Diana couldn't leave the children, and because if he simultaneously insisted on stopping my income, I couldn't possibly afford it. However, I only mentioned the first point, and it seemed to do the trick.

"Very well," he said. "But you're not to work. I'll give you the injections. And you're to have massage as well."

"*What!*"

"I said massage. I'll arrange it all. It won't hurt you."

He was treating me now, though he was quite right to do so, as an idiot. But I never asked him why I was to be massaged; for my ungrateful object now was to get him off the premises before he thought of anything else.

"All right," I said. "I mean, thank you very much."

I then started him on the subject of E. B. Turner, on which he was very sound, and began gently urging him towards the door. Of course Diana was lying in wait for him downstairs, and of course she came up presently, while I was staring out of the window, and managed to convey at the same time that I was a bit of a hero and that it was all my own fault.

"I don't know what we're going to live on," I said.

"Don't start that again," said Diana. "I know just what you've got in the bank."

She knew this, of course, because she always comes and reads my account-book, and because it's always lying on my desk. So I had to admit that I could afford a short holiday, though I was very nervous about breaking the news to my agent, and was convinced that the publishers and editors would think I had gone mad. I started it there and then. I had the doctor's prescription made up. I went off to lunch at a Club. And on the following morning, though I rose at the usual time, I just sat about doing absolutely nothing at

all. I felt guilty. But I was still frightened. And, besides, the click had come in the wrong direction, and I knew now that I couldn't write a solitary word if I tried.

It was the strangest sensation. My mysterious symptoms—though my head often seemed to be floating above my body—were better already; but in one moment I had become completely work-shy, and this certainly showed that there was a difference from ten years ago. Another odd thing is that though *Morning, Noon and Night* stayed in a drawer for eight months now—but I was back on the stories long before that—I couldn't, even if I were put to the torture, show anybody the page or even the chapter where the two halves join. I just can't explain that, when I think of my sufferings before the doctor came. Anyhow, it was Anne's fifteenth birthday now, and we all spent the evening at another pantomime, at the King's Theatre, Hammersmith, which was exactly a hundred times livelier and funnier than the West-End pantomime that three of us had seen on Boxing Day. Every now and then I thought: "I've had a breakdown. I suppose I do feel a bit crazy. I wonder if I'll ever do any work again." But I laughed, too, and joined in a chorus-song, and whenever I glanced at Diana I knew that I was really safe.

The next day the doctor came back with a box of *ampoules*, and started the injections. And presently a masseuse arrived and kneaded me. I had forgotten to ask what effect this was supposed to have, but as she kneaded me she also told me that massage cured everything. So I waited for the results, and I waited for the results from the *ampoules*, but either the virtue had gone out of them or else it was true that I was no longer thirty-four. So when the box was finished, I told the doctor that I was better. And then I caught a cold, which seemed a good way of stopping the massage. But I wasn't really better, after that first, false phase of relief. I was deathly tired, and unspeakably depressed. I must have been an awful nuisance in the house.

Not that I haunted the drawing-room, or was completely idle. After a few days I fetched Anne's theatre—or Anne's Theatre—down to my study from the schoolroom, and started improvements to the lighting. I put in dimmers—for sunrises and sunsets—I put in blue and green and red lamps as well as the white ones, and I fixed spot-lights on each side of the proscenium opening. Then, suddenly, I opened a drawer in my desk, took out my old paint-box, and began

painting scenery, too. There was a wood, there was a kind of music-hall drawing-room, an art-gallery, a clergyman's dining-room, and the long perspective of some antique cloisters. Best of all, there was a complete representation of an empty stage. The manageress, back at her lessons now, came in and approved what I had done, but I still couldn't tell her what production I had in mind. On the other hand I was now very busy with some tiny characters—I painted them all on Mary's old invitation-cards—of a suitable nature for each of these sets. And a little later—very extravagantly—I bought a miniature cinema-projector, with a film of the fire at the Crystal Palace, so that Anne's Theatre could provide this kind of entertainment as well. It all kept me occupied, I suppose, and everything that I did amused me for just five minutes after I had done it. But I couldn't or wouldn't plan a complete programme, and as the days grew longer, the season for toy theatres seemed suddenly to have passed. So everything went up to the schoolroom again, and I took to doing cross-word puzzles and reading books instead. For still—doctor or no doctor—I knew I couldn't write.

It was in January, while I was still playing with my paint-box, that Diana had an impulse to add to our aviary again. She came home one day with two new budgerigars—a blue husband and a grey wife—and put them in the corner opposite Bully, on the other side of the big witch-ball. They were supposed to be a further and belated birthday-present for Anne, who was still technically Charles's owner, too. But girls of that age don't readily remember about sand and seed, and of course it was Diana, again, who did all the work. They were nice birds, though, in spite of their voices, for they had been trained to sit on anyone's finger, and they sat on mine every morning before breakfast; though not, of course, until I had exchanged whistles with Bully and given him his grain of hemp. The husband was called Blue and the wife was called Ada, for very good reasons which would take rather long to explain. And I liked having them, though I had naturally protested when they first arrived. But Bully, of course, was the head bird, just as Topsy was the head dog. There was never any question, or shadow of disloyalty, about that.

This was Diana in one aspect. But as a wife she was also trying to cheer me up. And as a mother she was already, I gathered, giving a great deal of thought to our own—or perhaps one should call it

our elder daughter's—Ball. I contributed the undeniable statement that we couldn't afford it, but Diana said we'd got to give it—for if not, our child would apparently be disgraced—and then, which certainly seemed a very good notion, she said that it was to be given in conjunction with the Hopwoods and in honour of Moira, too. For Moira had now also been to that polishing establishment in Paris, and was preparing at any moment to burst forth as a *débutante* in turn. So Frank and Audrey came to dinner with us, and Frank and I groaned and mocked, but our two wives—whom of course we also admired—began hatching plans like anything, and the Ball, it seemed, was to take place at the beginning of July. The actual date must be settled, so as not to clash with too many others, through some mystical exchange and mart; but both mothers were quite inflexible, and it was only a few days later, in fact, that they found the date and were inspecting the ballrooms at a number of smart hotels.

"Have we *really* got to do this?" I still asked.

"Yes," said Diana. "Of course."

"But why July?" I inquired, thinking of the interminable suspense. "Couldn't we get it over a bit sooner?"

"The later we give it," said Diana, "the more people will know, and the more people will ask Mary to *their* dances in order to be asked back to ours."

"Well, here's an idea," I suggested. "Let's announce it for the *end* of July, and then, when the time comes, let's just say it's cancelled because somebody's ill. If we do that, she'll have been asked everywhere for nothing, and——"

"I'm ashamed of you!" said Diana. "I've never *heard* anything so dishonest. Can't you even think of Anne?"

I turned paler than ever.

"Do you mean," I faltered, "that we've got to give a Ball for her, too?"

"Probably," said Diana. "When the time comes. And, anyhow," she said, "you know you like the Hopwoods, and I've been awfully clever over that."

Quite true. I liked the Hopwoods enormously. I still liked them, in fact—and this is a real tribute—even after we'd given the great Ball. But I was scared, and I was class-conscious on behalf of the unemployed, and I hadn't much enjoyed the last Season, and I was either mean or economical—perhaps both—and I was unemployed





MARY, 1937

*Photo Tunbridge*



myself at the moment; and it didn't make the slightest difference what I was, for all this was in Diana's department, which she understood so thoroughly, and in which, even if I couldn't help her, I must at least not let her down. So we were to give a Ball with the Hopwoods on the sixth of July. And Mary and Moira were to be the joint heroines, and often I could hardly sleep with anxiety, and then again there were a few, rare moments when I was rather excited. While Diana remained competent, and consecrated, and calm.

Telegram from Ned Sheldon, on February 9th. "Why not vacation over here while your bucket fills up which it surely will." I was profoundly touched—and, again, I still am—but I wasn't well enough; I couldn't cross the Atlantic alone; and my income had been cut off. So I thanked him deeply for yet another act of kindness; and almost immediately was facing a further manifestation at home. Little Dorothy and Douglas were going off for a holiday in the Austrian Tyrol, and they asked me to come along, too. I was overwhelmed, for they knew quite well what a weight I could easily be. But they also knew, for I had rashly told them, that the doctor had suggested my going abroad, and this was their way—imagine it, for I was still nearly as old as both of them put together—of making it as easy for me as they could. I was tempted. I was nervous. I saw myself returning in a glorious state of high spirits and health. I saw myself being carted off to a sanatorium and wrecking their whole trip. I accepted. I went and got photographed for a new passport. I looked at my portrait, which was far too truthful, my head began spinning round again, and I rang them up and backed out. From cowardice? From unselfishness? Well, just a little of the latter, I should like to think. But I wasn't going, anyhow, now; and they understood, or said they did; and I'm quite sure that they were much happier without me. Diana had just stood by, in the hope, perhaps, that I should at last be able to make up my mind about anything. But I was still a nuisance and a problem, though she never let me see that I was either. And I was still, it seemed, to infest my own household; never feeling well, always feeling unhappy, and perpetually drawing on her own strength and spirits because, as I quite realized, I had rushed past a dozen warnings in the last two years and had gone head-on into the crash.

She said: "Of *course* you needn't ever work again, if you don't

want to. Of *course* we can manage somehow. We'll sell both the houses and cut down everything, and we've both got investments now, and we'll be *perfectly* all right."

But I did want to work. I couldn't give up altogether at forty-four. If it came to that, I didn't want to sell the houses, because I was insanely proud of them both, and of what they represented as an illusion of worldly success. And it would be fine fun for Mary if we moved into a hovel, with no servants, just as she was starting a Season that was to make up for the miserable ending to the last. So I was glum and unhelpful, and threatened to start work again there and then—though I knew I couldn't—and Diana put up with this, as she has put up with everything, and suddenly invited eighty-six mothers and daughters to tea.

Opening, in other words, though this was still the last week in February, of the spring and summer campaign. I wasn't at the tea-party myself—I was taking Anne to a Shirley Temple film—but a vision now shows me the daughters making a good deal of noise, while the mothers bring out little notebooks, and exchange or pass on names, dates, and addresses. The dance-dinners are thus organized, though at present the actual guests may be still unknown, and some mothers—less conscientious than Diana—will continue to conceal them until almost the last day. Often our own board would be graced by girls whom we had never seen before, who brought with them young men of whose existence we had only just heard. But all the girls must be fed before dancing, and each must be provided, however soon she shook him off, with a complementary cavalier. The rota of chaperons must also be arranged, for convention had restored them to the ballroom now; and whatever the girls might be doing by the time they were nineteen, the neophytes must all be provided with a protectress, who must remain on the premises until the dance was over, and then, as often as not, must drive her own neophytes home. At two or three o'clock in the morning, or sometimes later still, Diana would frequently be taking a taxi-load all over London, until the last girl had found her latchkey, and the cab could ultimately turn for Chelsea and home. All this, and much more, was again lying ahead of her, in the sacred cause of devotion to her daughter. Indeed, though the full flood wouldn't burst until towards the end of April, preliminary dances were already being held; and the first of Diana's own dinners took place—while Anne

and I slipped off to the Chelsea Palace—only four days after those eighty-six characters had come to tea.

Then she caught a cold, and had to delegate her duties. But on March 1st six couples dined, and so it went on, with gathering speed—though there would be a brief interruption at Easter—until her engagement-book was even fuller than a year ago, and the mirror in Mary's bedroom was crammed with invitations (so oddly addressed to "Miss Mary Mackail and Partner"), and early nights for two members of the household would be something almost unknown. I caught a cold myself, too, at the beginning of March; but rose again, to attend another domestic dance-dinner, and to go on—because it was being given by my publisher for his own débutante daughter—to the dance itself. Once more I watched Mary, as I had once watched her at those children's parties, and just couldn't make it all out. But Diana and I, and the publisher and his wife, and the Vincent Masseys, all had a very good supper together, and except for one fatal drawback I should say I was happy enough. I ought to have been worrying about my work in the morning, instead of worrying because I wasn't going to do any. Suddenly the fatigue bowled me over again, and I slipped out and just caught the last bus.

A few days later Anne paid yet another visit to the oculist, and this time he was so encouraging—though still there could be no release from the spectacles—that her parents, or at any rate her practical parent, decided to take her away from the governess, whose knowledge she now seemed to have exhausted, and to send her to a third day-school. It wasn't quite as near as the others, but it had a reputation for intelligent teaching, and was also—which was perhaps more important from Anne's point of view—being attended by her friend Jane Hughes. So this was arranged, and would start next term—with Paris, again, as the ultimate educational objective—and Anne seemed satisfied, and though I was earning nothing, I'd still got some money in the bank. Very well, then. Mary to the dances, and Anne to the day-school. We must still all pretend that the future was as safe as the past.

So again Diana and Mary went off to the Grand National, in the glorious directors' train, while I stayed at home and looked after the dogs. But something rather interesting was also happening in the right-hand bird-cage. For a short while ago Diana had purchased, and I had installed, a small wooden nesting-box; and though all the

experts said that budgerigars never bred if there were the least disturbance, we couldn't help noticing that Ada was now spending nearly all her time in this retreat. So one day I waited for her to come out, and then flashed a torch through the tiny opening; and there, sure enough, were four eggs. This was at once a triumph and a problem. For if they all hatched, we should have six budgerigars to cope with. And this meant that we must either buy still more cages, or must find some suitable home. So we went on watching and waiting, and on the day when Mary was hostess at a contemporaries' cocktail-party—where very little alcohol but a great deal of tomato-juice produced an almost deafening uproar—I must say that I thought the problem was solved. But I was wrong. One sensitive egg undoubtedly succumbed. But a day or two later the torch disclosed three revoltingly ugly, bald babies, with black patches over their eyes, and after this the family never looked back. They came tumbling out of the nesting-box, they staggered, they grew feathers, they were almost as large as their Pa and Ma. I removed their birthplace hurriedly, in case it should all happen again; presently they set up house for themselves in the schoolroom; and then, thank goodness, the suitable homes were found. Once more we were down to three birds again, which was quite enough. Yet there was a look in Diana's eye which already, as I could see, was contemplating the following spring. You might have thought that her maternal instinct was doing more than enough; but she hadn't forgotten where we'd put the nesting-box.

Anne and I saw the Boat Race again this year—and again at the Herberts', so that again I was trapped into a severe attack of vertigo on their hospitable roof. I got a press-cutting a few days later, from which it appeared that a gossip-writer had also been there (yes, the same who had once asked me my income), for I was publicly and correctly branded as "pale." But by that time, though perhaps I wasn't much ruddier, for I was still very far from well, we were all down at Hillside for Easter—"lovely, peaceful rest," says Diana's entry, which indeed referred to a lull before the storm—and it was here, on Easter Sunday itself, that Mary became eighteen. So we gave her offerings, and toasted her, and still it seemed that she was a *débutante*—though she wasn't going to be Presented again—partly because of her age, and partly because of that unfortunate false start last year. But she didn't mind this, for she had made friends and

knew the ropes now, and she liked the dances, and this time she would be off with a flying start. So I gazed at her speculatively, and thought, with a good deal of dread, of our own Ball. Its *venue* had been chosen now, and the estimated cost appalled me. But if there had ever been a chance of avoiding it, it was much too late. Let her be happy, then, whatever my inscrutable principles and fears. For Diana was quite right again when she pointed out that one's only eighteen once.

At the beginning of April our tenants left Rooklington—in apple-pie order, too, except for their poodle's attentions—and we all went down there at once. Again Diana was gardening and feeding the donkeys. Again I succeeded in reviving the Rover—and had no excuse now for not helping her with the morning shopping. The bungalows hadn't noticeably increased during the winter, though they would during the summer, and a gap closed up as the old, sea-side habits and customs were resumed. Perhaps the greatest change was that young men were now arriving, and would continue to do this, in addition to both new and identifiable girls. But they were all quite polite to me, and I didn't see very much of them, for their petrol-consumption was incessant and extreme.

Otherwise this month was one—and especially towards the end—of frequent nights in London for Mary and her mother, a few hours of which were spent at Church Street, but most at the dances that were now beginning to flow into a spate; while Anne and I remained with the Pokes, and sometimes I sat at my desk. Nothing happened there. I felt giddy; desperate; made a few notes, and came downstairs again very much on the verge of collapse. But whatever Diana might have said about retiring, I knew now—and perhaps had known all along—that I must still write if I possibly could, and that the longer I put off the struggle, the harder it was going to be. At first I had believed—for it is odd how one can see oneself as a character in a story, or in other words without half the qualities and characteristics that no human being can escape; at first I had believed that if I absorbed the doctor's medicine and injections, put up with the massage, and took the recommended rest, then quite suddenly I shouldn't only feel perfectly well again but should be full of plots, dialogue, witty comments, and everything else that my livelihood required. I had supposed that one day I should wake up feeling twenty years younger—though as a matter of fact I had been a bit

of a wreck then, too—and should dash to my desk to start writing again with enormous vigour and no trouble at all.

But now, after three months of treatment and idleness, I knew that such a day could never dawn. I knew that the only hope was to kick my damaged faculties back on to the old treadmill, and to resume my painful efforts almost exactly where I had left off. At forty-four—and it was jolly nearly forty-five now—one doesn't dip into fresh and inexhaustible reserves; or certainly not if one has gone and squandered one's substance as I had. In fact, I had already and actually pointed this out in *Morning, Noon and Night*. But I had thought I was a detached observer. I had forgotten that I was a specimen, too.

I knew it now, though. I knew also—indeed I did—that writing isn't a job that ever gets simpler, and that for an author with any conscience at all no single word can ever write itself. So at the end of April, or thereabouts, I resumed my ordinary hours and efforts, and started the short stories again. I found them no easier. From this date, indeed, I was to find them infinitely more difficult; which was the same with everything else. But Diana had given up trying to stop me, because she knew now that she couldn't. I was doomed. Or I was doing what I had to do. And at any rate I was now earning a living again.

This was decidedly advisable. Not only was the overhead rising with the Season, but on April 20th the latest Budget had again raised the standard rate of income-tax to five shillings in the pound. I shuddered; for this meant that for the first thirteen weeks of the fiscal year we must all work for nothing. While for the last fifteen weeks of the year on which I was about to be taxed I had done no work at all. On the other hand, if it were to be regarded as an insurance against war—and this was apparently the notion—then of course I should raise the money somehow, and pay up promptly; and so I did. But it didn't turn out like this. We paid to avoid the war, and then we were all swept into it, prices and income-tax both rose together, and in my own profession payments fell, until now, I suppose, the position is so far reversed that only (with luck) what I could once have earned in thirteen weeks is available for the overhead at all. To put it quite frankly and bluntly, I think we've been swindled. In fact, I know we have.

Returning, however, to 1937, on May 3rd we were all back in



London, where the Coronation flags and bunting were filling the streets, and a bus strike was at least making some of them more visible. At Church Street we hung out two trophies and a banner, the latter having been over-printed where it had originally alluded to another King; but it was while I was actually attending to this that I was called to the telephone and asked if I would be an usher at a memorial service. I couldn't refuse, and didn't want to refuse, for we had lost a very old and true friend. But as I laid down the receiver, I suddenly remembered that my wedding garments—the ones that I had bought for little Dorothy's wedding—were only equipped with a pale-grey waistcoat, and that I hadn't got a black one at all. So I had to borrow this from my next-door neighbour, and after I had put some safety-pins in the back, it seemed to look all right from the front. Then I went off—with Diana, of course—to the memorial service, and there I discovered, of course, that ushers weren't needed at all. For at a wedding one can easily murmur "Bride or bridegroom?" to the gaily-dressed arrivals. But at a memorial service not only is there no such distinction, but the mourners come in with a remote or distracted expression, and pay no attention to any attendant at all.

So I hovered, and stood about, and tried to look helpful, though everyone avoided me. And then suddenly I saw the smallest and saddest figure in the world. J. M. B., in his scarf and overcoat; pale, drawn, the very symbol of tragedy and grief. Looking desperately ill, too, as indeed he was, and with no gleam of recognition for anyone from those hollow and deeply-shadowed eyes. He passed within a foot of me, but I could only let him pass. Then he went slowly up the aisle of the church, and that was the last time I saw him; for somehow he must have made himself invisible, or have found another exit, when the service came to an end. Two sorrows, therefore, as I slipped into a pew at the back. Not that I should have known what to say to him if he had seen me. But I wished he had, if only for a quarter of a second. So that perhaps I could have shown him a hundredth part of the sympathy and affection that I felt. It wasn't allowed, though. Death had come between us. And Death was only waiting now to strike at that defenceless and fragile figure, too.

London was getting fuller and fuller, though there were still no

omnibuses, and the Coronation was on everybody's lips. I was working now, and I still had my horror of crowds; but on the great day itself—Wednesday, May 12th—Diana got up at a quarter to four, roused our daughters, and left the house at five o'clock for the window in Parliament Street which her father had again placed at her disposal. As it turned out, in this and thousands of other cases, she could easily have started very much later, for the newspapers had issued so many warnings, and the barriers that had been erected looked so alarming, and the weather was so very unpromising already, that a great many Londoners decided to stay at home. One heard, indeed, afterwards, of cases where, on suddenly changing their minds, they had found themselves almost in the front of the throng. And of other cases where, by merely seeking to leave their own point of vantage after the King and Queen had passed them, they had then met the procession elsewhere and had an excellent view of it again. But Diana and her daughters were jammed in their window, and were pretty tired by the time it eventually appeared. Then the rain began falling hard, which perhaps was another omen, and as there were no omnibuses, as the Underground was hideously congested, and as they could find no empty taxi, they all had to walk back to Church Street in the downpour. So that they arrived saturated, and with their shoes in pulp. And I'm afraid that I saw less reason than ever to regret having stayed where I was. Nevertheless, Their Majesties were crowned now, we should all see a lot of still and moving pictures of the event, and the radio—which I had occasionally switched on while I was writing—continued to give us a pretty good idea of all that was taking place.

More dances this week, of course. Another dance-dinner on the Friday. And then we all went down to Rooklington for Whitsun, with "Coronation Sports" on Whit Monday, in the usual ingenuous form. Back to Chelsea again. Still more dinners and dances, night after night, with occasional and brief appearances of the author at both. Diana and I at a great banquet, given by my cousin Lorna's husband, who—as I was surprised to learn, but I was extremely grateful for the evening—was Mayor of Westminster this year. On the following day I lunched, by appointment, with Peter Davies at our literary-dramatic Club, and there was a surprise here, too. I had thought that he was just feeling friendly, but though this aspect of the meeting was certainly in evidence, it appeared that he had a

business proposition as well. He wanted me to write a book about my grandmother and her sisters, who indeed were interesting enough; not only for their own remarkable characters, but on account of the men whom they married and the sons to whom they had given birth. In fact, I should very much like to read that book myself, and there can be no doubt that Peter was on to a very sound idea. But what did I know about biography? And what, if it came to that, did I really know of the details of all those lives? I temporised—because I was tempted—and for some weeks I alarmed and stimulated my surviving relations by cross-examining them and demanding their old diaries and letters. But the more I looked into the matter, the more I was conscious of inadequacy and fatigue. Perhaps I could have done this, too, ten years ago, when memories were keener, when I was less aware of my own limitations, and when a doctor hadn't been telling me to be careful and go slow. Now, in any case, I suddenly knew that it was impossible, and told Peter, and the whole plan was dropped. He took this well, for he was a philosopher as well as a publisher. And personally I took it even better. For now that I hadn't got to write about my grandmother and great-aunts and first-cousins-once-removed, relief and reaction were a distinct help to the output of short stories.

At the end of May there was another week-end at Rooklington—which was of less professional assistance, but Diana badly needed these breaths of fresh air—and this time the weather was absolutely glorious, and we were all being told that Neville Chamberlain had succeeded to the office of Prime Minister.

I wondered why. The general answer seemed to be that there was nobody else; and perhaps there wasn't, for perhaps all the other possible candidates had been killed in the last war. Yet here he was, with no election to confirm his appointment, and with very few qualifications that were visible to the naked eye. He was a son, it was true, of Joseph Chamberlain, who had at least not avoided the South African War—which it would be difficult now to define as anything but an act of aggression, and in which the phrase "concentration camp" first came to my childish ears. He was also a half-brother of Austen Chamberlain, who was generally credited with the Treaty of Locarno; which in turn—though I admit that this wasn't his intention—is now generally credited with having paved the way for the second world war. As for himself, we were reminded now,

and I had no difficulty in believing it, that he had been an admirable Lord Mayor of Birmingham. But I couldn't forget the first Ministry of National Service, in 1916, and how all that it had done under his sceptre was to put up a lot of posters and to cover the pavements with yellow arrows, all pointing in the direction of his headquarters; though if anyone followed them, they were still offered no national service to perform. The whole Ministry, in fact, was a complete muddle—though of course it wasn't the only one—and presently a job was found for it in administering the Conscription Acts. But Neville Chamberlain was a member of the Government now, and with that surname and in this country it seemed that we had got him for life. Postmaster-General; Paymaster-General; Minister of Health; Chancellor of the Exchequer. There were gaps, it is true, while the Labour Party was in uneasy and temporary power. But as Birmingham always provided him with a vast majority—it had been nearly 22,000 in 1935—and for the other reasons that have already been mentioned, he was always back in office in a very short time.

What had he done there? His duty, no doubt, which was to agree with the rest of the Government and to follow the advice of the various Permanent Secretaries. But beyond this he was still, for most of us, remarkably negative; even though he had addressed us, as part of the news-reel, at the last General Election, with a remarkable physical resemblance, through this medium, to Groucho Marx. But he hadn't made us laugh, and I didn't feel particularly like laughter now. It was quite obvious that we were drifting towards war, and what we needed was someone to stop the drift. We needed a realist. We needed a man of immense initiative and energy to act in a hurry before it was too late. We needed—God knows how we needed—someone to tell the customers the whole truth. Well, we didn't get this, whether we deserved it or not; and whether or not we were now to be punished, in the Old Testament manner, for what another generation had done in South Africa or for our complete blindness to the inevitable effects of Locarno. We had got the wrong leader at the wrong time. And as if this weren't disturbing and alarming enough, there was the added absurdity that the outgoing Prime Minister had retired because he would be seventy in August, while the incoming Prime Minister had been sixty-eight last March.

The Press didn't help us. If it were Left, it attacked him—just as it had attacked his predecessor—for his long connection with the

Right. And if it were Right, it praised him as a bulwark of the constitution, and barely mentioned the main and urgent problem—let alone his obvious incapacity for dealing with it. My great hope, of course, was that I should turn out to be an ignorant and prejudiced pessimist, and sometimes, as I read the newspapers and listened to the radio, I could almost believe that I was. But I wasn't really. I was leaderless; for the peace fanatics were just as remote from realism as the National Government, and the Opposition was still anxious to fight reaction all over the world without any arms. Everywhere the spirit of nationalism was cursed in foreigners and extolled as a virtue at home. Everywhere men had beams in their own eyes, and were screaming about the motes in others'. If one spoke of these things—save to a very few, who were as powerless to change them as oneself—there were already looks of suspicion, as if one were attempting to weaken what would presently be called the "war effort." Hatred was being brewed again, and not only by the die-hards and old toughs; for it was advanced and intellectual now to trade stories of Continental atrocities, and to see no good, even where it existed, in countries where the same feeling was being fanned against us. Man was again plotting his own destruction by a method which had certainly proved adequate enough last time, but had made enormous advances since then. Perhaps, again, this wasn't his intention, but it was the direction in which all governments were pulling him, or pushing him, or at least letting him slide. There had been a chance just now for a new broom, to cleanse the temple. For an architect to examine its foundations. For a strong man to make a mighty effort in the little time that was left. We needed brains. We needed luck. We needed an utterly new outlook on the whole desperate situation. And we had been given Neville Chamberlain instead.

So I was thoughtful, and failed, I am afraid, to feel any great enthusiasm, but still didn't see what on earth I could do. For my work was so obviously the first thing, and even when I turned aside from it, which wasn't often now, I must still use my feeble faculties to back Diana up. On my forty-fifth birthday, accordingly, the Hopwoods came to dinner with us, and afterwards—not exactly by way of entertainment—we all went off to the big hotel where the Ball was to be held, and discussed its details with the manager. It seemed now that something like five hundred guests had been invited, and

perhaps my chief contribution at this juncture was to try and look as if I should be able to pay. Which I did, as a matter of fact, when the time came, and so did Frank; though I should add—and do add, with the utmost appreciation and gratitude—that at the last moment Diana's father suddenly gave her a cheque which substantially reduced our share; and that Diana herself then gradually contributed to the bulk of the balance, so that in the end it seemed that I had been more of a moneylender than anything else. But I didn't know all this yet, any more than I knew that we should be paying for about fifty guests who had never been invited at all. I was merely aware that we were in for it, that Diana was being astonishingly efficient, and that it was pleasant to be having an evening with the Hopwoods, even in such terrifying circumstances as these.

Down to Rooklington again—after all, we were spending nearly every week-end there now—and a sign, perhaps, that my iron constitution was recovering from some of the things that I had done to it at last. For on the Monday—June 7th, this was—Diana and I, and the dogs, set off in the Rover, with the intention of leaving it at Lewes while we completed the return journey by train. But as we neared what I had supposed was our immediate destination, a sudden impulse caused me to go on driving, and thus it was that for the first time in something like nearly two years—and though I only kept it there for the inside of a week—I again drove a car into London. For the last thirty miles we moved in a queue, and from Croydon onwards, in this summer of 1937, we could hardly move at all. My opinion was confirmed, therefore, that this kind of motoring was very little fun. But I'd done it, and I couldn't have done it two months ago, even on the slightly emptier roads. So that I was rather pleased with myself, even though I wasn't—or at any rate just yet—going to face the ordeal again.

It was during this week, I see, that quite a long story at last came to an end. Because I had learnt the piano myself, I had tried to make both my daughters do the same thing. Mary started, stuck, and stopped. Anne started, plugged along, but never seemed to get much further; never, in fact, seemed to reach the point where it was any real pleasure to herself or anyone else. So this summer Diana had heard of yet another instructress who was said to work miracles; and we engaged her; and certainly she was extortionate enough. But her system, so far as I could discover, involved little actual playing.

She used to move the piano, she used to build up a special piano-stool, with a chair and some books, so that the student should be at just the right height from the ground, and she was extraordinarily particular about the angle of the student's arms and wrists. I don't know what happened after all these preliminaries—perhaps there was no time for anything else—but I seldom if ever heard a note being struck, and finally I came into the drawing-room one day and found that she had broken the lid of the keyboard. Anne said she had been trying to remove it, though Heaven knows why, or how this could possibly have assisted the lesson. But I felt, pretty strongly, that I wasn't paying all that money to have my own instrument destroyed—for all I knew, she'd be removing its legs next time—and as it was quite clear now that Anne, like Mary, belonged to the generation of gramophone and wireless, and would never belong to any other, I abandoned this ultimate attempt, and remained the only pianist in the house. Until, of course, I left the house and lost my piano.

So then we all went down to Rooklington again, but on the Monday afternoon we came up by train, and it was in this that Diana suddenly showed me an evening paper. It said that Sir James Barrie was ill in a nursing-home, and I thought of that last glimpse of him, and my heart missed a beat. I rang up the flat from Chelsea, and was slightly encouraged by the butler's report. Could I write to him? The butler was non-committal, and would supply no address; but I wrote, and I suppose somebody got the letter, though naturally no one remembered it when I was able to ask. But I still thought of him, not only as I read the doctors' bulletins, but all day long, and again as soon as I awoke; for I had known him, and had been a victim of his spell, and the recipient of enormous kindnesses, for nearly forty years. Once the sun's rays were cut off completely, but then we had come closer together again—as suddenly as if a cloud had passed; and it wasn't the cloud that I remembered, but J. M. B. in my childhood, and J. M. B. in the days when I used to haunt Kensington Gardens in the hope of picking him up for a walk, and J. M. B. giving me the freedom of the theatre, and J. M. B. at all those lunches, and teas, and dinners, in the Adelphi flat. Diana and Mary were going to Ascot again all this week, and on the Thursday we celebrated our twentieth wedding-day—if one could believe such a remarkable thing. But all the time my thoughts were in an

imaginary nursing-home, for I still didn't know where it was, and all the time another kind of cloud weighed heavily on my spirits and my work.

On the Friday we went down to Rooklington again. Late on the Saturday afternoon I went into Splashcliff—as I often did in those days, to buy an evening newspaper; and as I opened it, I saw that the end had come. I was dreadfully unhappy, though he had been seventy-seven and his sufferings were over; and because of this, or because, perhaps, my constitution wasn't really an iron one after all, I began feeling very ill, too, and discovered that my temperature had gone up. It flickered for a week, with aches and pains, and days in bed—though I got back to London on the Monday, and managed to do some work. "I know how you feel about Barrie," said a telegram from the unfailing Ned Sheldon. And I knew, too, though I couldn't express it; except, apparently, by running a mild fever, which was no help to myself or anyone else. But I missed him. And I was miserable. For the memories couldn't leave me alone.

Back to Rooklington. Up to London. The Ball only eight days off now, or on Tuesday week. And on this Tuesday Mary was taken ill herself, with the beginning of an appalling, poisoned swelling over one eye. At a less important moment in history Diana would have known just how to deal with this herself, but so much was at stake that she hesitated to rely on her own judgment; sent for a doctor; who sent for a specialist; who ordered the precise treatment—no more and no less—that Diana would have employed if she hadn't hesitated. All, in fact, that we had gained was some delay, and very considerable extra expense. But it was an old catch, of course, that experts thrive on; and perhaps, in this case, we were buying a few pennyworth of reassurance as well. Nobody on earth, however, could make the swelling subside until it chose, and it wasn't only painful for the patient but a source of great anxiety whenever we all thought of the Ball.

On the Wednesday, which was the last day of June, I put on my best clothes again—but I was now supplied with a black waistcoat of my own—and Diana and I, having first interviewed the specialist, set off for St. Paul's Cathedral and the Memorial Service for the late Sir James Matthew Barrie, Bart., O.M., whose remains had been laid to rest at Kirriemuir exactly a week ago. A large and distinguished congregation. An Anthem; a Psalm; a Lesson; another Anthem; an



Address by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who could tell few of us, however, more than we already knew. And then a Hymn, and some prayers, and another hymn, and the Blessing. I stood up, and sat down, and knelt, like everyone else. And I thought. And presently we were all quietly moving away, and one nodded at one's friends in a reserved and distant manner, and received the same guarded response. It was all very sad still, and this Service had to be held. Yet it all seemed very remote from the spirit that had left us behind. I couldn't and didn't feel that there was any close connection between this sombre, grandiose ritual and the man whom I had known. But I behaved exactly like a character at a memorial service, and so, of course, did everyone else.

Home again. Nurses in the house now, the doctor calling every day, the patient receiving flowers from her friends, and rather too many visits, I thought, as well. But perhaps she was just a little better, and at least the whole medical profession was now well aware of the importance and significance of the Ball.

On July 1st Church Street became Old Church Street, though it would be months, if not years, before the residents, or anyone else, could remember to use its new name. Yet men were appearing with the new name-plates, which for a while would be fixed above the old ones—with the word "late" in between. I watched them, with deep resentment and indignation, and presently the spirit moved me to call on the Borough Surveyor and to ask him if I could buy one of the old plates when the time came for them to be removed. He was suspicious at first. He seemed to think that I wanted to put it up again, and only yielded finally when I promised to take it down to the country. But having received this pledge, he was either generous or baffled by the problem of getting my proffered payment into his accounts, so that in the end I obtained it as a gift. The plate, in other words, which had once been fastened to the wall opposite Elm Park Road, on which William de Morgan and Felix Moscheles had once looked out, and past which Augustine Birrell had so often strolled, was suddenly delivered to me by two puzzled-looking workmen. I tipped them. I placed it in the garden at Rooklington, where it continued to bewilder a number of people, and there for three more years it remained.

There was something else, however—and we hadn't forgotten about it—that took place at the beginning of July. For on Friday,

the 2nd—when we had planned to go down to the country again, but couldn't—Topsy celebrated her tenth birthday. To be slightly more accurate she was, of course, entirely unaware of it, and as there was no present that we could give her, there was little enough that even her friends and admirers could do. As we always made a fuss of her anyhow, we could still only look at her, and talk to her, and stroke her, and feed her as before. But of course we did all this with special emotion and affection, for when a dog is ten a human being is seventy; and, besides, it was at ten that Rufus had gone. Impossible, therefore, not to look ahead with terror and foreboding. Yet Topsy, thank Heaven, was still not an old dog. Her eyes were just a little clouded now, but she was still active—except, as always, when she had those sudden twinges that were a relic of her great illness—and she was still ready enough to roll over and play "Wuff." Anne and she were still the very closest of friends. But Diana and I still felt no jealousy, for of course it was we who loved her most. And through all this business of dances and dinners and the rest of it, though she and Victoria must necessarily spend many hours alone together, I can truthfully say that neither of them was ever neglected. Always they had their walks and outings, and their food and water, and their baskets, if they chose to use them, or the full freedom of the rest of the furniture when they didn't. And Topsy, especially, returned every ounce of this affection. She never complained, she was never impatient, she didn't know what it meant to snap or be irritable. Unfailingly benevolent and gentle and kind-hearted, she was the one creature, perhaps, on whom we could invariably rely. And on whom we did rely, whenever we were anxious or worried, for she was always ready to look at us with adoration and to restore our self-conceit. I don't pretend that she understood all our difficulties and troubles, but she didn't have to when she could give out sympathy like that. A push or a pat from Topsy could always soothe us and reconcile us to our burdens again. She asked for nothing. She was a slave, one might say, who had been bought for two guineas, and would have given her heart to anyone, even if they had been cruel to her, with whom it was her destiny to live. But that wasn't how we thought of her. She was our companion, who had shared everything since the autumn of 1927, and we felt a great debt to her which we knew we could never repay. Always we had felt this, but on her tenth birthday we felt it more than ever. For there was a little tomb-

stone in the garden, to remind us unceasingly of what we had lost and must presently lose again. How long, now? We couldn't put this fatal question in words. But of course it must haunt us now, whenever we looked at this little, sleek dog herself. It has to, after any dog's tenth birthday; unless one is as heartless as our darling Topsy was devoted and steadfast through the whole of her innocent life.

It was very hot that week-end, as Mary still stayed in her bedroom, and as we continued to watch her progress towards recovery with somewhat bated breath. On the Sunday I see that Anne and I paid what was now one of our much more infrequent visits to the Zoo. On the Monday Diana and I attended yet another memorial service, and, though I shan't say more about it, a very sad one, too. And on the Tuesday I woke up in the morning, and realized that it was the day of the Ball. For nothing less would Mary have been allowed to leave the premises, but the medical profession had been squared—indeed, they were now showing considerable enthusiasm—and the specialist himself was going to apply a small piece of virtually invisible gauze. If we could have put the thing off for perhaps even three more days, there would have been no sign of the trouble at all. But of course we couldn't, for the five hundred guests were expected, the band had been engaged, the supper had been ordered, and we couldn't conceivably let the Hopwoods down.

So Mary, in her new dress, must also reveal—though only by a very close inspection—that she was wearing the bit of gauze as well; and this was something that both she and her parents would willingly have avoided if they could. But it might have been much worse, as we all realized, and anyhow it was the 6th of July at last. I worked as usual; in fact, I finished another short story. In the afternoon I put in a brief appearance—perhaps chiefly so as to remove myself from an atmosphere of so much strain and suspense—at the Oxford and Cambridge match at Lord's. Then I came home again, and presently started dressing up like anything, if not quite as soon as Diana, and Mary, and Anne. For of course Anne was coming, too, and so was Michael Hopwood, though he was even younger. We might be on the brink of a great public occasion, but in both families there was a powerful domestic aspect about it as well.

Was I ready now? I was. Were the others? Not quite. But I

went upstairs again, to brush some more Pekingese hair off my trousers, and suddenly I was being told to ring up for a taxi. It came. It waited. At last the joint-heroine of the evening emerged from her bower, and the whole family embarked. Broad daylight still. Anne was wearing a white fur jacket over her ball-dress, which again covered my dark clothes with hairs. But I brushed them off in the cloak-room at the hotel, and then I came out again, and there were the Hopwoods; and here were the first of our more favoured guests, who were to join us at a sumptuous dinner in the restaurant. I didn't know all of them, by any means, but I knew my own neighbours, I knew my own family and the Hopwoods, and I wasn't so far gone yet that I couldn't recognize a glass of champagne.

So we ate, drank, and made distinctly merry. And then the Hopwoods and Mackails found their way to another entrance, at which the rest of the guests were to arrive. Audrey and Diana were to shake hands with them all. So were Moira and Mary. Frank and I were to stand just behind our wives and daughters, but ready to dart forward at the sight of any guest with whom we felt that we ought to shake hands, too. This was left to our discretion, and by now I hadn't got much. But Diana, who knew what my face did at parties, had whispered an urgent "Look pleased!" And I certainly managed a fairly convincing, if also slightly convulsive, grin.

A flunkey in knee-breeches—who is very likely in the Far East now—shouted out names. Black coats and light dresses came streaming past us. Hands were shaken. Occasionally I took part in this, too. My mother arrived, and though I had known quite well that she was coming, the whole thing was so fantastically unreal now—so obviously a wild dream—that you could have knocked me down with a feather. She, too, however, received a glimpse of the galvanic grin. And Diana's parents arrived, and I was delighted to see them, though for some reason I could no longer hear anything that they or anyone else said. And hundreds—it seemed much more like thousands—of strangers continued to troop past us, as Diana, with no apparent effort at all, gave each of them an enchanting smile.

There was a brief pause. We could hear the band playing now, and after a swift consultation it was decided that the later arrivals must be shaken hands with elsewhere. So the reception committee broke up, though in the outer lobby an employee was still numbering the people—for we were to pay at the rate of so much a head—

while another collected their invitation cards, if they had remembered to bring them, or failing this invited them to sign their names in a book. It was by this superficially rather inhospitable device that we had hoped to keep out the gate-crashers, who were going very strong in 1937; but of course it didn't make the faintest difference, for they just signed the first name that entered their heads, and came straight in. About fifty of them, as I said before, when a subsequent scrutiny was made. Furthermore, quite a number of authentic guests went off to other dances, and then came back again, thereby doubling the poll-tax. If they did this more than once—and some of them did, for they told us, and with such an air of paying a compliment that I grinned more alarmingly than ever—then they could easily cost us as much as five pounds. But to do me justice I wasn't thinking of this either, as I still perambulated and grinned.

I can faintly remember dancing with my own family. I can remember the remarkable and constant adhesion of a number of young men to the bar. I can remember having supper, though I had no idea how my partner had been selected, for I scarcely knew her, though I was aware that her daughter had been at Mary's school. I can also remember my surprise when the dancing was suddenly interrupted for a performance by a talented cabaret artiste, whom some of the younger generation had enticed from the main part of the hotel. He did it for nothing, and it was dashed good of him, but his lyrics were distinctly more sophisticated than some of the chaperons and at least one of the hosts. Then he vanished, and the dancing was resumed. And the people began going. And presently, or eventually—though Heaven knows I didn't need it—I was partaking of a strange kind of breakfast, consisting of bacon and beer. But what I principally remember is walking—hundreds of miles, I should say—from room to room, up and down stairs, along the corridors, and always—because of my conscience and Diana's instructions—with that fixed beam on my face. I beamed at complete strangers, who drew back in alarm. I beamed at old friends, some of whom were unable to penetrate this disguise. I beamed at matrons and maidens; and at every type and character of my own sex, including not only the dancers and drinkers, but waiters and musicians as well. Sometimes I passed Frank Hopwood on my endless rounds, and he seemed to be beaming too. I think we were a couple of damned good hosts.

I believe, also, that our slightly satiated guests considered the evening quite a success, though I don't know for how long they were able to distinguish it from all the others. But there could be no doubt that honour, under the contemporary code, was satisfied, and that for all the hospitality that Mary and Moira had enjoyed, their mothers could now look any other mothers in the face. The great campaign which, in Mary's case, had started nearly fifteen months ago, had now reached its glorious climax. And, as I also said before, but as is very well worth repeating, the Hopwoods and the Mackails of both generations had survived it, and would continue to be the very firmest of friends.

The immediate aftermath for myself was a muscular affection in both cheeks, caused, apparently, by the duration and extent of those grins. While for the world in general it took the form of war between Japan and the Chinese Republic, which broke out, though it still hasn't been declared, on the following day. Then, for the younger generation wasn't entirely graceless—and one knows now that any amount of them were to be authentic heroes and heroines all too soon—a spate of brief and monotonous thank-letters began passing through our letter-box. And then, though my cheeks had recovered, I went to bed again—perhaps as the result of talking as well as beaming—with a sore throat and swollen glands. It was eight days, in fact, before I was more or less all right again, and it was on that evening, also, that Mary and Diana went to their last dance of the London summer. "Sad in a way," reports the latter, though one might well believe that she had had enough of them by now. But the 1937 Season was as good as finished and done for, and it was very hot and stuffy, and we all pined for the sea. So we all went off to Rooklington again, and two young gentlemen came to stay there for the Goodwood races, which I managed to avoid myself. For I was still working, and in spite of the Ball and my other afflictions should have completed three short stories again by the end of the month.

It was drawing nearer. The young gentlemen left, and some girls arrived instead. Ought I to take a holiday this August, when we had spent so much, and I had taken three months, in a rather dismal sense, already? Well, I was going to. Because I'd got to. And because Diana insisted, and for once I wanted her to insist. So I finished the third story, and laid down my pen. August now. Very warm and fine; with the downs shimmering, the sea sparkling, and

the author spending a great deal of his time in the garden and flat on his back. The Pekes came and blew at me, and I caught hold of them, and rolled them over, and rubbed their little chests. Charles, the cat, prowled in the offing, but caught no birds now, thank goodness, for they were all growing up. Bully and the two budgerigars sang and screeched in the drawing-room, or sometimes joined us in the garden, too. My daughters played the gramophone or turned on the radio almost incessantly, but I didn't mind this when I wasn't working, and there was no neighbour within earshot whom we could possibly annoy. Their guests came and went. We bathed. We attended the Produce Show. On Diana's birthday we all had a slap-up lunch in Eastbourne, and went on to see Leonora Cazalet and her children at Cooden Beach. We gave a great, country cocktail-party. We went in to Brighton to see the try-out of the next Palladium revue.

Then it was time for the annual visit to Hillside Hall, and off we all went for a week there, and as it was still warm and fine, spent a great deal of time in the new swimming-pool. On the return trip the Rover was smitten with a species of palsy, and for the last part of the journey had some difficulty in achieving even twenty miles an hour. It was all that laying-up that had done this, of course, and though the Splashcliff garage was flummoxed by its symptoms, I have no doubt that the makers—if I had given them the chance—could soon have restored it to health. But though it was true that I had driven it little more than ten thousand miles, it was well into its fourth year now, and secretly I even welcomed its weakness as an excuse for trading it in. I had no notion, as yet, of what its successor would be. But my eyes and ears were open, and this great decision was much in my thoughts as, at the beginning of September, I again sat down at my desk. The Season was only a faint echo now. The principal characters had rested and slept, and were both very much stronger again. Anne still spent hours with her rustic friends on the farm. The bungalows were still burgeoning, but the troops and the majority of the local holiday-makers had gone. There was a lot to be said for Rooklington in September, and particularly when I was under the pleasing illusion that I had done a good morning's work.

*Jacinth* was published on September 6th, and was rather amusing, I thought. So did enough other readers to make me not dissatisfied with its reception. Its heroine was certainly a highly idealized

version of any *débutante* that I had ever met, and perhaps if I hadn't begun writing it before I knew any, it would have been a more brutal and less kindly work. Yet allowing for my rose-coloured spectacles, it wasn't a bad picture of the social scene. I had kept the approaching war out of it for the technical reason that I didn't want it to date. But of course it does date. It's a museum-piece already. There's hardly an incident, from beginning to end, that could possibly happen now. On the other hand, it is accurate enough, in my view, to be taken as evidence that the slightly upper middle classes weren't really provoking thunderbolts by their conduct this year. I have heard so many voices saying, "Oh, of course we were all too comfortable and luxurious"; as though the war were a purely sumptuary affair, or as though Heaven waited to punish any people that was having too good a time. I can't accept this description of a country in which, up to the eve of hostilities, there were still nearly two million registered unemployed. As to whether my own method of expenditure were making this situation better or worse, I decline to commit myself, just as I decline to admit that political economy is a science. But the people whom *I* knew weren't asking for thunderbolts. I think they were just trying to be happy and to make their children happy, so far as circumstances would allow. And I can't see that this was a criminal offence.

As for the unemployed, they haunted me, as they haunted others. But the Government, it seemed, could only palliate in peace-time, and though it had been in power for six years now still lacked the courage or intelligence for any more thorough-going scheme. If they had told me, for one, that by charging ten shillings in the pound they could have put those two million on to self-respecting work, I should have paid it, I should have felt that something was being done, and I should have had the reasonable hope that in the long run we should all profit. But I suppose they thought I'd vote against them if they tried this, or they had too much on their hands already, or they couldn't think at all. Only another war, it appeared, could ever improve the unemployment position. But there's no profit in that for the people. And when it's over—win, lose, or draw—it only produces more unemployment again. Such thoughts came to the author of a light novel about a *débutante* and her admirers. Perhaps they were worthless, and certainly they were useless, from any practical point of view. But what the dickens, the devil, and the



absolute blazes, was an author in this frame of mind to *do*?

More guests at Rooklington in September. Mary off, on a visit, to Scotland. Anne back to school. Mussolini meeting Hitler in Germany. The last Sunday was signalized by a call from Mr. and Mrs. Robert Douglas, whom of course we were delighted to see. And on the last Monday I said good-bye to the Rover, which henceforth would merely be represented by a credit with the Splashcliff garage, until I had made my new choice; and the rearguard, consisting of Diana and myself, two dogs, three birds, and a cat, all drove up to London in a hired car. But, alas, there was only one goldfish when we arrived there. For Fishbel—or Pisky, as he or she was also known—had succumbed during this holiday to an attack of illness, and only the noble, glorious Fishwick, larger than ever and glittering like real gold, still circled the pool in the garden or paused to be fed. I missed his (or her) companion very much indeed. Yet somehow I am bound to admit that Fishwick had always been my favourite.

Life in Chelsea again. Work, friends, lunches, dinners, and all the rest of the usual autumn scene. In the middle of October Diana, accompanied by a cousin, went over to Paris once more; partly to enjoy and refresh herself, which she seemed to have done, and partly so as to look in at the polishing establishment and remind them that Anne was expecting to be polished next year. During her absence I took both our daughters to the Holborn Empire, where we were joined by my own cousin Di and her husband, and afterwards we had a late dinner at Rule's. Quite good fun, and quite nice daughters, I thought. I wished that Diana were with us, but she was watching the fireworks at the Paris Exhibition, and wasn't, for once, having such a bad time herself.

So then she came back, and we both went to the Motor Show, which was now being held at Earl's Court, to look at the new cars. Again I accumulated a vast quantity of what the salesmen call literature—and perhaps they're right—and asked cunning questions, while Diana looked at the coachwork and upholstery, and there was the usual difficulty with my long legs. We came to a stand where there were some low, broad vehicles about which I knew nothing at all. I should probably have passed it, if somebody hadn't suddenly opened a door, and if Diana hadn't instantly slipped into yet another seat.

"Come on," I said. "We mustn't waste their time here."

"But this is *marvellously* comfortable," she said. "And look how roomy it is, too."

So I got in beside her. And then I got out again, and tried the front seat, where the remarkable thing was that there was room, and even room to spare, for both my legs.

"Well?" said Diana.

"Yes, I know," I said. "But——"

I was about to explain that I couldn't possibly buy a French car of such fantastically unconventional design, when a man put his head through the window and began spell-binding. Almost immediately it seemed that all its eccentricities were actually unmitigated improvements, and when he added that after a head-on collision in a similar model the other car had just crumpled up, while his own had emerged virtually unscathed, I felt—though I hoped to avoid the same experiment—that perhaps I was on to a good thing.

The next phase was his discovery that I was pledged to the garage at Splashcliff, which caused him to lose all interest in me and to fade away. But I hadn't lost interest myself. And though again there were two trial runs before I took the final plunge, I never really regretted my Citroën Fifteen. For the first trial run revealed that its rival had at least six quite inaccessible greasing-points, not to mention a hand-brake lever that impinged with some violence into my person. But the second was a sensation. The demonstrator insisted on blinding round corners at forty miles an hour, which you can do in a Citroën—provided nothing is coming the other way—because of its front-wheel drive. He also asked to be shown the roughest road in the district—and as he was demonstrating at Splashcliff, there was no difficulty about that—over which he also drove at the same pace, while the Citroën's remarkable suspension still suggested that we were gliding over ice.

So this, and its roominess, and a lot of other advantages, settled it all; and when the spring came I was to have a black Citroën with fawn upholstery, and nothing else. As for my patriotic conscience, well, in the first place the French were still allies, while in the second place about half the car was now being made in this country and I should be paying a heavy duty on the rest. So there seemed no real need to apologize to anyone. And I didn't. And because this has always been my particular kind of luck, I must admit that the

silencer had to be replaced, and the dynamo came adrift, and that to the last there was what was technically known as a rough spot on the crown and pinion. But it was a good car, for all that. The best, without any question, that I ever had. I was so deeply attached to it—though it seemed safer, as usual, not to tell it so—that after I had eventually taken delivery I refused to lay it up at all; for whatever the other risks it certainly mustn't be let in for paralysis like the Rover. In the spring, therefore, I should again be a London motorist, and back at my old garage in the King's Road; where the Citroën would remain, when we weren't both down in the country, until the day when I had the luck to remove it a few hours before a high-explosive bomb fell through the roof, and blew a vast hole just where it had been standing.

In October, 1937, however, my only immediate trouble was that at the same Motor Show I also picked up the most appalling cold. It was historic. I was in bed for four days, in more discomfort than I should care or am going to describe, and remained a good deal of a wreck for several weeks. But as soon as I arose I was at work again, and suddenly, after one more short story at the beginning of November, I yanked the manuscript of my interrupted novel out of its drawer, and rushed into it again at once. I wouldn't look back, not that I had forgotten its earlier chapters, because I hadn't forgotten the breakdown either, and was scared that if I did look back, I should find myself in the same sort of jam again. I just plunged ahead—not sparing myself, because I still hadn't learnt any other system—until presently I could faintly see the end on the horizon, and knew that I was going to finish it after all. This wasn't yet, though. There was a good deal of a struggle still. But I must have been better, in spite of that cold, for there had been no fight left in me ten months ago.

It was in November, also, that I had a message from Cynthia Asquith—J. M. B.'s secretary and executor—to the effect that his will had provided for the distribution of some of his belongings among his friends, and asking me what I should like. I didn't know. I didn't know what was available, and for some reason I was particularly anxious not to ask for anything that anyone else might want. Presently, however, I thought of an oil-painting of his St. Bernard, Porthos, which had emerged some years ago as one of the pictures in his big study. And I had known this Porthos

at the end of the nineteenth century. And rather hesitatingly I made the portrait my choice.

It was all right. Nobody else had put in for it, and presently it arrived. Unframed, as it had been in the big study, and badly in need of professional cleaning. But these matters were attended to. Back it came from a shop round the corner, glistening, and in its new frame; and there and then I took down the Medici print of one of the Duke of Richmond's Canalettos, which until now had been over the fireplace in my study, and hung up the picture of Porthos instead. As I raised my eyes from my work now, I gazed at that noble and mournful head, and it often seemed to me that its expression bore a curious resemblance to that of its vanished owner. Perhaps it inspired me, though often, I know, it made my thoughts wander. But I was very glad indeed to have it, though I still had no notion what else it would be asked to inspire.

Often, now, when I came into the drawing-room, I would find Diana with a pencil in one hand, and lists and printed forms in the other. No, she wasn't planning another Ball—though Mary, virtually released now from chaperonage, was still frequently out until after midnight. She was contemplating the prospects of various football teams. In fact, she had become an addict of the Pools. She had never seen a match in her life, but suddenly she knew all about the Arsenal, and the Wanderers, and Charlton Athletic; and even about Partick Thistle, which I was still mis-reading as "Patrick Thistle" myself. Thus, in a sense, she was a typical client, for it was the chance of risking a penny and gaining perhaps twenty thousand pounds that so strongly attracted her. But in another sense she wasn't, for the organizers used to send her photographs of the lucky winners, and, as I couldn't help noticing and pointing out, not one of them was the least like Diana. I also pointed out the precise odds against which she was staking her alleged skill. But it made no difference. To her as to all the other clients there was an even chance, every Saturday afternoon, of making a fortune or losing a few shillings. So she continued to patronize both Messrs. Littlewood and Messrs. Vernon, and I'm bound to admit that every now and then they sent her a postal order for even as much as seven-and-six.

Puritan England and Official England thought it all very wicked;

they spoke of gambling, and hinted that the working-classes—and presumably Diana—were starving their families, and pawning their belongings, so as to indulge in this demoralizing wild-goose chase. But I think they were quite wrong. For in the first place there was a low and definite limit to the amount that one could stake; while in the second place Diana and the others were only engaged in the pursuit of happiness, which they regularly achieved, whether they won or lost, from the moment that they had completed their forms until the moment when they learnt the results. That was all. So of course the puritans disliked it; and of course Official England was gambling itself. It was gambling, but with other people's lives and money, that there wouldn't be a war; and when the war came, it would be gambling with them still. Furthermore, the Exchequer was making a very considerable income from the poundage on all the postal orders and the stamps on all the envelopes—for the law itself demanded that this method should be employed—so that though Official England was pretty snooty about the Pools, in the House of Commons and elsewhere, it wouldn't move a finger to diminish its own share in the profits. My personal contribution was to read out the results on Saturday nights, and occasionally to make a wild entry on one of Diana's forms without consulting the prophets or tipsters at all. But I couldn't see then, and can't see now, that any immorality was involved. The Government's notion was that people should work like beavers for its own benefit, without ever being consulted as to how the taxes were spent. It had even fixed things now so that you couldn't go to a play or any other form of public entertainment without being taxed again. Well, Messrs. Vernon and Messrs. Littlewood and their *confrères* had found a way round all this, and were selling a weekly dose of voluntary and harmless pleasure, while the Government—terrified, as always, of the nonconformist electorate—didn't dare put a tax on it, and must just go on looking down its own nose. Of course, it was open to the Government to provide pleasure itself. It is even arguable that this might be regarded as its duty. But it didn't. It provided anxiety and uncertainty and endless restrictions to the freedom of which it was always boasting. It fined people for dying, as though it suspected that this was a pleasure, too. By fining them it was destroying history and beauty all over Britain; though its foreign policy hadn't yet brought this destruction to the heights that it would reach in a few years.

It didn't apparently regard itself as a trustee for anything that had been handed down to it—except, perhaps, the astonishingly impractical system by which its own business was run. If it had been one hundredth part as efficient as Messrs. Littlewood and Messrs. Vernon, there wouldn't have been two million unemployed; or when it did find work for some of them, this wouldn't have been in the construction of engines of death. So that's the answer, and that's what I think about the Football Pools. And I miss them, in their full glory, very much indeed. For of course whenever Diana won seven and sixpence by spending eight shillings, she immediately gave us presents and treats.

On November 20th, for instance, she took us all to *Crest of the Wave* at Drury Lane (though I should like to add that I paid for the preliminary banquet), where Dot was again on the crest of her very best form. And the Government got quite a bit out of that. It wasn't, perhaps, now I come to look at the record, exactly the Saturday night that we ought to have had on the eve of Anne's confirmation. But I don't really think this mattered, and we were all in the right frame of mind for the ceremony on the Sunday afternoon. It went well, and I was touched and moved, from my inconspicuous seat. There was a thick fog, too, which somehow added to the religious atmosphere; though perhaps this particular cause and effect should not be too closely pursued.

More fog at the end of the month. A dance-dinner at the beginning of December at which Mary could now be hostess, so that this time—and possibly henceforth, until Anne had been duly polished—Diana and I were both able to sneak out. A nice lunch, just a week later, with Dot as the hostess now, and her child and son-in-law as the other guests. Scene: The Ivy. Dot knew everyone there, and Diana and I knew nobody. But she told us who they all were, and we gazed respectfully—for of course they were the cream of the Profession—until somehow we were all laughing again. More dinners, at home and abroad. The novel really moving once more, though I still hadn't looked at the beginning. And then the end of Anne's autumn term, the end of Diana's triumphant and scrupulously thorough Christmas shopping, and so, two days before Christmas itself, all down to Hillside for a long, foggy week-end in Gloucestershire. Thence the rest of my family made straight for Rooklington, while I broke the journey for more work in London,

but joined them on New Year's Eve. Mary, however, must either have passed me on the way, or have left as soon as I arrived, for she and her friends again sang *Auld Lang Syne*, or as much of it as they knew, at the Chelsea Arts Ball.

Anyhow, it was the end of 1937. The end of the year in which I had either been genuinely ill or inexcusably idle. And the end of the year during which our domestic history was so largely overshadowed by the great Ball. Other things happened, and I knew that some of them were happening, and would have done much to prevent or avoid them if I possibly could. The general attitude seems to be now that from 1936 onwards there was really no hope; that war had become inevitable, whether we were preparing for it or not. I don't know, and I'm not sure. I still feel that at least ninety-nine per cent of its prospective victims were desperately opposed to it; that the merest whiff of that gas from *In the Days of the Comet* might still have halted the blind leaders or taught them a little sense. But already they were all blaming each other. Already, as the shadows deepened, they resolutely disregarded the possibility that they themselves were wrong. Patriotism, as to which I have always agreed with Nurse Cavell, demanded this deadly illusion, however clear it may be, in all other matters, that when grown-up people quarrel not one of them is ever entirely in the right. The object-lesson was still clear enough, too, one would have thought. So, quite undoubtedly, were some words that were still in print. Blessed are the peacemakers. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him. But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.

No, I am not pretending—despite that recent outburst about the Football Pools—that all or even most of the sin can be charged against the country in which I happen to have been born. But I do say that these words weren't mere figures of speech, or only intended for a little pastoral community two thousand years ago. They were meant to be taken quite literally, by every human being. And so far, through all those centuries—and though I know, too, that my own sins, in these and other matters, are heavy enough—the system embodied in such phrases hasn't even been tried.

The Devil can cite Scripture for his purpose? Possibly; but mere citing doesn't necessarily make one a devil. And here's another

thought. "He that is not with me is against me" can be said by Satan, too.

## CHAPTER XII

1938

MARY came down to Rooklington on New Year's Day, 1938, accompanied by two young gentlemen with whom she and others had been revelling at the Albert Hall, and as it was now a Saturday, they stayed on with us for the week-end. By Monday the guests and the host had both left. And on Thursday the rest of my family returned to Chelsea, and Anne—who would be sixteen next week—took a trial trip, as it were, at a half-grown-up dance. On the birthday itself the same kind of ceremony was repeated in our own house, where about twenty-five couples danced—with a little band again—from eight o'clock until midnight. I danced myself once or twice, I tried to look respectable and paternal, but there was little or no strain, except for Diana, and there was no need at any moment for me to produce my convulsive grin.

There was more encouraging news from the oculist two days later, who gave us his blessing this time until the following autumn; and two days after that, again, my younger daughter returned to her tasks at school. This was her third term there. The first had cost me £25. The second, to my slight surprise, had cost me £32. Now I received, and paid, a bill for £40; and again, since my younger daughter was having exactly the same instruction as before, I rather wondered why. Diana, however, seemed shocked by this speculative mood. It was her view, apparently, that if I queried this latest account, I shouldn't only expose myself as a niggardly skinflint, but should be imperilling my younger daughter's education as well. According to her, or as far as I could gather, headmistresses always charged a bit more each term, and no decent parent must ever ask why. As a matter of fact, I had noticed this myself on many previous occasions; but this time the increase did strike me as rather startling, and I was relieved in a way—though Paris, of course, would cost far more than this—that Anne's third term was also to be her last. So, as I say, I paid up without further comment; and



was rewarded by a supplementary account for £6 9s. 8d. when Anne finally left. I could certainly do with some of that money to-day. But on the other hand, if my two daughters aren't bluestockings now—and they're not—no one can say that this is due to any parsimony on my part. What a game it all was!

On January 19th I took Mary, in her best clothes, to another of little Dorothy's first nights. She was playing the lead now, and it wasn't her fault that the production was a failure. But Mary and I were full of hope and excitement, and got there a bit early, and because of this, perhaps, were photographed together in the stalls. I tried to look as if this were the kind of thing that always happened to me, but this effect was rather marred by the photographer's assistant, who came hurrying up immediately afterwards to ask us who we were. So I said that Mary was a very well-known *ex-débutante* and, in a more mumbling and uncertain voice, that I was myself. The assistant seemed a little disappointed; but we got our portraits in a glossy weekly just the same. Mary looked everything that I had described her to be, and I, for some reason, looked about ninety-five. But Mary was delighted, and I didn't mind, and the picture went into her great scrap-book—which makes me so sad now whenever I glance at it, because of all the fun that has been taken away.

A couple of nights later we all went to the Tyrone Guthrie and Oliver Messel production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Old Vic. I hadn't only presented this play myself, at Mackail's Theatre, but I had also seen it presented by Tree, Benson, Oscar Asche, and Granville-Barker; so that Diana, who has a slight prejudice against Shakespeare and hadn't forgotten our joint sufferings at *The Cherry Orchard*, seemed to think, until we got there, that I was rather overdoing my love of the Bard. But it was all right when we did get there. I was ashamed because the smarter part of the audience talked all through the Mendelssohn overture; but as soon as the curtain rose, and Diana saw that she was in for an early Victorian evening, I think she was nearly as happy as I was. Afterwards, it is true, she complained of the Bard's humour, but no one could complain of the scenery, or the dresses, or of that exquisite flying ballet. I forgave the Old Vic for *The Cherry Orchard*, for, like Bottom in a sense, I was translated. I thought, and

still think, that the whole thing touched perfection. My scalp tingled. I was sulky in the intervals. And at several moments I had considerable difficulty in not bursting into tears. Then I came out again, much moved, but was back, about a fortnight later, before the end of the intentionally short run. I tell you, it was even better than my own production; and I can't say fairer than that.

Another play on the last night of January, of a rather different kind. Diana and I, in other words, at *Me And My Girl*, at the Victoria Palace, which had opened about six weeks ago, and would still be running, after over a thousand performances, when all theatres were temporarily closed at the beginning of the new war. When we took the children about six months later, we all laughed ourselves silly, but I am afraid we were rather disappointed on this first occasion; perhaps, in my own case, because I was still so full of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. There we were, though, and everyone else was laughing, and it was our own fault, no doubt, if we didn't laugh, too.

Or had my work got something to do with it? I had finished *Morning, Noon and Night* ten days ago, and had even written another short story since then. That was all right. But I had also looked back at the beginning of the novel, and though of course it was going to be revised anyhow, and though as a matter of fact it hadn't struck me as at all bad, somehow there had been all the feeling of a twinge from an old wound. I couldn't forget what I'd been through last January, and for the first time, also, I had finished a novel without knowing, even vaguely, what novel I was going to write next. Always, hitherto, a bit of the conscious or subconscious mind had attended to this, and often there had been a choice of glimpses offered me as I came out of one novel, and before I plunged into the next. Nothing, this time, except the little glimpses of short stories. A vague desire to interpret something much vaster than could be treated in three hundred pages of bright clean fiction. But another dream at the same time, which is no help to any author, of chucking the whole affair, going to ground somewhere, turning into a hermit, and reading nothing that had been written since the introduction of compulsory education. Or, again, a dream of putting all my savings into some kind of business, which would give me a rest from creation, and free me for ever from this present job of exposing myself in ink. But then I thought of Sir Walter Scott

and Mark Twain, and what happened to all authors who meddled with the mystery of money. I should look a fine fool if I exemplified the parable of the talents in that way. Besides, I couldn't even make my counterfoils agree with my pass-book, so that I should probably find myself in gaol. And, besides, I had a family to keep going. And, besides, again, whether it were a question of habit or divine afflatus, somehow I *must* go on writing, because I felt such an idle rascal whenever I stopped.

I see now, I think, that I was suffering as much as anything from the future rather than the past; for even by the beginning of 1938 anyone with the least sensibility could almost smell the chaos that was to come, and I didn't think that there would be much place in it for clean, bright fiction. So I was worried, as the human race began turning towards astrologers again; as I realized how helpless it was in this horribly familiar phase; and as I looked from one useless leader to another for anybody who should release us from the cage of nationalism, and still saw nothing but its deification, and the demand everywhere, because of this, for more and more weapons of war. And that, perhaps, was partly why I couldn't laugh, when Diana and I attended that performance of *Me And My Girl*.

Yet the clocks still ticked, the days still passed, and the organism of 107, Old Church Street still functioned much as before. I went on with my short stories. The dance-dinners started again, and again, for there was a temporary escape from extreme youth and inexperience, Diana could often accompany me now on a quieter and earlier evening on our own. In the middle of February there was another family week-end at Rooklington, which we rather regretted because of the icy cold. And in the middle of the following week I lunched, at a cost of three shillings and a penny, with Peter and Nico Davies at our joint Club. They had suggested this on the telephone, and I expect I looked forward to it, because I liked them both, and had known them all their lives. Yet in spite of their attempt last summer to turn me on to a book about my relations, I suspected no special motive when they rang up. I just thought that as their office was near the Club, and as they often lunched there anyhow, it had occurred to them that we might meet and talk.

This was still my belief when we entered the strangers' dining-room, where, as on previous occasions, we could have a table to ourselves, and needn't all sit in a row. But they didn't wait long

before they came to the point. Peter, as Chairman of Messrs. Peter Davies Ltd., and as spokesman at this moment for his partner and brother, too, suddenly told me that they wanted me to write the official or authorized biography of J. M. B. I thought this a fantastic suggestion, and refused at once. They then began flattering me, which of course I liked, and I suppose, after the first shock, I began using other bits of my mind. I still knew that I couldn't do it, and we all knew that Barrie himself had often said that he didn't want it to be done—even though on other occasions he had also discussed it as inevitable. I thought how tired I was. I thought, naturally, of how little I really knew of the subject, and how ill-fitted I was to go poking and penetrating into the past. Yes, of course I knew what he was *like*, and there were hundreds of scenes and incidents that I had witnessed myself. But his early years were still almost a complete mystery to me, and even in my own lifetime I couldn't pretend that I had known more than a fragment of all his activities or of the circles in which he moved. And, besides, I wasn't a biographer. I was a novelist.

Yet if it came to that, I was a novelist who at the moment was apparently at a dead end. Was this a way out of it or past it, then? Was Peter the agent of Providence? I toyed with this notion, as he and Nico still flattered me, but now it also occurred to me that a book like this would take at least a year, that if I tackled it I couldn't possibly do anything else, and that therefore I was going to lose a lot of income if I did. I must confess, too, that I wasn't altogether free from superstition. So often there had been a jinx or hoodoo on people who had come too near that incalculable magician, and if I had been spared so far, was that any reason for risking these dangers now? I thought of another threat, which was real enough in the end. Supposing war broke out when I was in the middle of a job like that, could I ever hope to finish it then?

I didn't say all these things, though it seemed that the brothers had already taken my refusal as a natural and even creditable reaction that they could now more or less disregard. But I did make what I thought was rather an obvious counter-suggestion. Why, I asked, couldn't Cynthia Asquith do it? After all, she had been J. M. B.'s secretary and intimate friend for nearly twenty years, she was an authoress, she was one of his two literary executors—Peter being the other—and she hadn't, so far as I was aware, got

a lot of agreements and commissions which in my own case would have to be postponed or put aside.

Peter said that he'd thought of this, but that she didn't want to do it. He said that she wanted *me* to do it.

"Oh," I said. And I thought: "I'll get that in writing from her." And I did, about ten days later, though I still hadn't made up my mind. The first conference, in fact, ended with no decision at all, apart from the brothers' declared determination to ask nobody else until I had irrevocably backed out. Indeed, they were extraordinarily patient, for it was the best part of two months before I gave them a definite answer and put the millstone round my neck. At the moment I was just honoured, flabbergasted, and dismayed.

But I knew what Diana would say, and she said it. She was nursing Anne, who was in bed with a bad cold after that icy week-end, when I came home. But she emerged, and I told her; and of course if I had told her that I had been asked to become Lord Chamberlain or Governor of the Bank of England, she would have shown exactly the same indifference to my shortcomings, and inexplicable confidence in my powers. "Of *course* you must take it on," she would have said. And this was what she said now.

I told her that I couldn't, and I told her that I should be ruined if I did. She said that of course I could do it, and that she didn't the least mind if we were ruined. I said that *I* minded. She said that I'd never get anywhere if I talked like that. I said that I thought it might be unlucky. She said I was an idiot. I said: "I wish *you'd* write it." She told me that I was the most sickening and tiresome man that she knew. I said I was aware of this, but that she'd got to go on putting up with me. And shortly after this exchange of affectionate compliments she caught Anne's cold, and retired from the fray.

But I couldn't do that myself. As I continued to write my short stories, I looked up, every now and then, at the portrait over my mantelpiece, and Barrie's St. Bernard gazed at me sadly until I nearly turned its face to the wall. I didn't know *what* to do. I knew that if I mentioned the matter to anyone else, they would all urge me forward; just as in similar circumstances I should have urged them. It was the polite, and the easy, and the encouraging thing to do. It didn't mean more than that; but I chanced it once or twice, and my forecast was quite correct. Hell, I thought. I *can't* do it.

But then what should I think of myself afterwards, if I didn't even try? All this was no help to the short stories. In fact, I was beginning to feel remarkably like a breakdown again. For again there was a weight on my mind and conscience whenever I woke up.

Meanwhile, Mary went off, accompanied by her special ex-school friend, to stay with some other friends in Holland. And after a bit of a dust-up in the Cabinet, the Foreign Secretary—who had acquired a certain reputation for his hats and waistcoats—resigned. As his principal contribution so far seemed to have been to make us even more disliked on the Continent than we were already, I can't say that I minded. But I can't say that I was exhilarated by his successor. Looking at him dispassionately, and trying—though the Press made this rather an effort—to disregard his alleged holiness, I could only see a man with great possessions and every conceivable advantage of birth who had achieved the minimum of practical success in a series of important public posts. This record, which didn't, unfortunately, stop in 1938, was so thickly cloaked by the well-known loftiness of his principles, that of course one was a cad if one said anything about it. Yet even cads, or, if it comes to that, atheists, are theoretically entitled to the protection of the State, and if we had got to have a religious Foreign Secretary, why couldn't we have a clever or lucky one, too? I still wanted Lord Palmerston, and look what I'd been given. A character who in addition to all the other enmities that he had inherited, and, as it soon appeared, was unable or unwilling to modify in any useful way, had appointed himself as moral censor to approximately a hundred and sixty-five million Russians. Bother his private life, I thought; it's *our* private lives that matter. I'll believe in him, I thought, if he starts by casting devils out of the Foreign Office. But he didn't. Nor would there be any evidence that he had read another text that I have quoted once already. Perhaps, as you point out, I am judging him myself now, and must therefore face judgment. But if they're going to view all the bodies, I think his case is likely to take some time.

Diana recovered from her cold, and we ended February by dining at the Café Royal and going across the road to see Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Moments of this I enjoyed almost frantically.

Then, of course, it was March, and we all took the first week-end

at Rooklington, where it was mild and balmy, and the sun shone all day, and lambs had begun bleating up the valley. Very good for the remnants of the two colds, as I still wrestled with that problem of the projected biography. On the Monday, which was March 7th, my third collection of short stories was published. *London Lovers*, with another preface, and all the old value for money; provided, that was, that anybody could be induced to buy a volume of short stories at all. In actual fact, I think the venture was justified, but if I had been more of a prophet I doubt if I should have chosen this week. For big news is seldom good for light literature, and it was on the Saturday, while the reviewers were still treating me as a phenomenon that couldn't very well be helped, that the Germans drove and flew into Austria, and the two countries became more or less one. The Press obviously expected me to be angry and frightened. The Government's reaction was, as usual, confusing and vague. They spoke some threatening words, they were alleged to be discussing the position with the French, but it seemed clear enough that the two countries weren't going to drive or fly into Germany. For some reason the affair was considered by his supporters to be a triumph, so far as I could make out, for the late Foreign Secretary; and I was considerably confused myself. From this end of the Continent there had never seemed to be any particular reason why Germany and Austria shouldn't be one country if it suited them; for they obviously had far more in common than, for instance, England and Wales. Moreover, they had both been on the same side in the last international upheaval; and would certainly be on the same side again if there were going to be another. It was true that most Germans were now supposed to be ruffians, while the Austrians were generally credited with a wistful, old-world charm. Yet it was this kind of assumption, whether justified by individual examples or not, that made the outbreak of wars so easy. You branded an entire population with some rather arbitrary characteristics—though you didn't always stick to them, for just look at the change in our attitude towards the Italians and Turks—and thus you convinced your own population that some people who were in fact very much like themselves were their dangerous enemies. Judging by the Turks and Italians, again, a few days' work by the National Press could make us think anything about anyone; and indeed the National Press was still either very ignorant or very misleading about the French, but in

either case had made us nearly all believe what certainly wasn't true. Yet if frontiers were the trouble, and a frontier had vanished without bloodshed, and if the Austrians had let it vanish, were we (and possibly the French) our brothers' keepers, or mustn't we have any brothers at all?

Oh yes, I know what it looks like now, and I know how much has been written to prove that even the *Anschluss* was the first, deliberate step towards world domination by the people who invented Christmas-trees. But no people is really like that, any more than they really choose their leaders, or can get rid of them once they're there. If the Germans were saddled with Hitler, and would naturally support him when he told them they were being encircled, we were saddled with Neville Chamberlain and Lord Halifax, and would naturally support them when they told us we were being menaced. It seems to me that it was as simple and tragic as that; that the leaders on both sides were muddlers and bunglers; and that because the quality that makes leaders is accompanied by a complete inability to realize that one can ever be mistaken or in the wrong, there were just threats and snarls and insults now—all scrupulously reported by the newspapers in each land—while those whose future was being treated so rashly could only tremble at the approaching storm.

What chance had *they* to avert 'it? Power and, as they supposed, knowledge were kept in a few other hands, and the instinct of loving one's birthplace was again being used to breed enmity and ill-feeling abroad. If they had trembled more violently, they might have shaken some of those leaders from their perches. But they didn't, because it was another instinct to be brave, and because the tradition of nationalism had been pumped into them not only by music-hall singers but by every political party from right to left. The world must be divided because it had always been divided. It was a con-founded nuisance and a gross extravagance, but no peace-loving Government was trying to alter it, and if any other sort of Government made the attempt, of course we must all band together and crush it. And then set it up again, perhaps, or something just like it—still in the sacred cause of nationalism. And then have a jolly good pop at crushing it again; though naturally it will be doing its best now to crush us instead.

That seemed to be the general process, though of course there



would be a great many speeches, and declarations, and pledges, and conferences as well. It was towards this that we were now either heading or being driven, with many an expression of high-sounding sentiments by the way. However, as nobody was quite ready yet for the next big explosion, we must still for a while subsist on suspense and growing tension, and hope if we dared, but in any case order more explosives, and at the same time take certain inadequate steps towards facing them when they fell on ourselves.

It was in *The Times* that I first saw the discreet initials A. R. P., but whether it were *The Times* that first printed them or not, they soon became part of the current language—God help us!—and it wasn't long before, on one of my walks with Topsy and Victoria, I came on an instructional centre only a few yards from our door. There was still a tendency to laugh at this kind of thing, but I can't say that I thought it very funny myself. Less than twenty years ago a great war had been ostensibly lost and won; it had shown clearly enough that civilians—men, women, and children—would be in it up to the neck if there were ever another; and now, in the spring of 1938, those twenty years of savage stupidity had brought us as far as this. Politicians didn't alter, it seemed, even on the rare occasions when their names were changed. They couldn't learn, Heaven knows they were unfit to teach, and now, having bungled and muddled again, they were preparing—no, not to resign and hang themselves, but to demand what they called sacrifices on the part of the common people. Sacrifices to what? To their own incompetence, of course; but of course they weren't going to say so. Sacrifices to the cause of Victory; that would be the phrase. And we'd had a Victory, and here we all were again, back where we'd started—except that we had now managed to quarrel with two of our former allies and were hardly on speaking terms with a third. So much, perhaps, for Democracy; only of course it wasn't Democracy, and never had been. It was a privileged oligarchy that had landed us in this mess, and would soon have us in a much worse one. We had paid them, and pensioned them, and given them free railway tickets, but the moment they gained the least authority over us they had all gone the same way. With the worst slums in Europe and the largest proportion of unemployed, they were ready to tell every other country how to run its own business. Well, I'm afraid the other countries weren't impressed. God knows their Governments had

crimes on their records, too. God knows we should all fight each other with the utmost courage, gallantry, and brutality as soon as we were told to. But where were our real enemies all this time? In the high places. And in this country they were sitting in a row in the House of Commons; already, I dare say, preparing their unspoken war-time motto. You haven't heard it? Well, of course you haven't, when they're so careful to whisper it only to themselves. But it has been clear enough in all their actions, and a great many of their speeches. "The Customer is Always Wrong."

Enough. I was a customer myself, as I still am—for I should be shot if I tried to deal elsewhere, and as a matter of fact I'm enormously proud of Shakespeare, and Shelley, and my native scenery, even though I don't happen to think very much of the Foreign Office. But I also had my own business to run, and a decision to make in it. So that four days after the *Anschluss* Elizabeth Lucas dined with me at my mixed Club, and we talked about Barrie—whom she had known so well for nearly thirty-five years—and I asked her advice. She looked at me pitifully, and told me to go ahead. She said that the task was impossible, but that I must do it. She said she would help me, and she did help me, and many another pleasant meal we shared. But I hadn't quite made up my mind yet. I couldn't, or at any rate that was what I thought, until I was through the present batch of short stories. So that Peter must still be patient; and he was.

It was in this month that Diana got the nesting-box out again, and induced me to put it back in the budgerigars' cage. The effect was almost instantaneous, though we were still having parties in the dining-room; and though I couldn't swear to the actual figures, I know that there were nine surviving little budgerigars, in two successive clutches, by the time that I struck and took the nesting-box (with several more eggs in it) away. Interesting, but rather alarming. "What on earth," I asked Diana, "are you going to do with them all?" "Keep them," she said, "for the moment. I'll think of something later on." So I trusted her. And presently they were all down at Rooklington, which was where I actually removed the nesting-box, and there seemed to be cages—all big ones, of course—in every room. But at the moment, as each day added to the chorus of squeaks in our Chelsea dining-room, we were still dealing with the second half of March. That meant the Grand National again,



*Photo Madame Yevonde*

DIANA, 1938



for Diana and Mary. And then it was Mary's nineteenth birthday, when she and her special friend gave a party at the Berkeley—though at their mothers' expense—and Diana and I had a quieter evening, in our ordinary clothes, elsewhere. On the last day of the month the Milnes again manifested their kindness and hospitality by giving us dinner and taking us to Noel Coward's *Operette* at His Majesty's. At the end we all went round to see Irene Vanbrugh; and for a moment I stayed behind.

"I say," I said, "they want me to write a life of Barrie. Shall I?"

"Of course!" she said, in the nicest voice in the world.

"But will you help me? Will you tell me things?"

"Yes, of course I will!" she said again (bless her heart), as I rushed from her presence. It looks, in fact—or I can see it now—as if somehow I must have made my decision, though I was still very cunning with myself, and wouldn't say so. I'd finished the short stories, anyhow. I'd spoken to my agent. And I think that even Peter knew he'd got me on the hook. Well? I felt that I was standing at the bottom of an immense precipice, and that for all the help I had been promised I must climb it without any experience and entirely by myself. I couldn't even see the top; but I'd got to get there. And on April 2nd Diana and I had lunch with A. E. W. Mason—who in this case had known Barrie since 1898—and again I was encouraged, and egged on, and offered aid. I was also given such an incomparable lunch that my mental powers felt feebler than ever. But how extraordinarily good all those old friends were to me, even though I knew it was for Barrie's sake. If I had let them all down, and never written the book at all, I should still have profited by their kindness.

Our spring term (as you might call it) ended with an invitation from one of Diana's fellow-chaperons to an evening party that was to begin so late that, in order to keep myself awake, we were compelled to go to a play first. This play, in fact, proved to be so dull that I nearly dropped off in my seat. But it was over at last, and now, as we drove on in a taxi, I was again asking Diana why the party was described as "baroque." She didn't quite know; but it seemed, a few minutes later, that we must all put on dominoes in our respective cloakrooms, and a few guests had arrived in a species of fancy dress. I remember two young men particularly, though I never saw their faces. They arrived wearing gas-masks, and with wreaths round their heads. Baroque? Or unspeakably macabre?

Poe might have done justice to my own feelings, but the other guests just smiled, or seemed to take that dreadful conjunction as a matter of course. These were the first gas-masks that I had seen, though they weren't the last; but I wouldn't have you suppose that there was anything the least indecorous about the rest of the party, at which there was just a little dancing, some supper, and some talk. No one could possibly say afterwards that it had provoked the Furies to send down fire on London. Yet those emblems stuck in my mind.

We all went down to Rooklington next day, for the rest of the month, and on the same afternoon I took delivery, as they say, of my new car. As usual, it seemed very stiff and strange. But as usual, also, it became my urgent ambition to reach the mileage at which I might start opening the throttle; so that I rose very early on several mornings, merely in order to go trundling round Sussex with this special object in view. In a fortnight I had done it, the stiffness and unfamiliarity had both gone, and I was still delighted with my bargain. The eccentricity, as it seemed to many, of a Citroën's construction often drew a small crowd of mechanically-minded spectators when the new car was parked. But I rather liked this attention, and was still always ready to give an explanatory lecture. On a number of occasions you might have seen me and a number of chauffeurs all kneeling together to gaze at the details of its suspension and front-wheel drive. I was never the least shy then.

The early drives show something else, though. I was working again. I had actually started the biography. I began it with no preparation, in fact, for the first chapter or section was to be a glimpse of the subject as I had known him in the last phase, and this must obviously be put on paper while my memory was still clear, and before I confused it with research. But when this was done, the manuscript retired. For several months now it must be all investigation, and letter-writing, and reading and ruminating on everything that Barrie had written himself. Sometimes, with my ancient habit of twelve hundred words a day, my conscience suggested that I was doing no work at all. It seemed shocking to get up, after three or four hours at the desk, with nothing to show for them but a few, abbreviated notes. But reason and Diana both assured me that I was right. I had got to discover everything that I could, and to digest it, too, before I began the real story that had started seventy-eight years ago.

In the middle of April, therefore, I summoned my friend Mrs. Alec Drummond, who had once been Miss Pauline Chase, to come over from where she was living, about twenty miles away. And she appeared. And I cross-examined her. And it seemed, which was very pleasant, that even our long talk about Barrie, and Charles Frohman, and *Peter Pan* in its prime, could also be counted as work. "I can't remember," she kept telling me; but already I was developing persistence and cunning. I suggested something. She immediately corrected me; and thus—as presently with so many others—old memories were revived after all.

The children had guests again. Mary paid another visit herself. And I toiled, and still drove the new car. April was ending, and Chelsea was calling; but what about all those bird-cages, and the innumerable baby budgerigars? I needn't have worried, for Diana could be persistent and cunning, too. Or merely by wanting it she conjured into existence a second-hand, outdoor aviary, from a shop in Splashcliff which had never sold one before. It was a nice home for them, I think, with plenty of room, with plenty of food, and with a mirror—supplied by the author—in which they could admire their good looks. Here, in fact, they remained, flying and squawking, and nibbling each other's beaks—but we never gave them a nesting-box, for we just couldn't have a million budgerigars—and they didn't come in again, or appear to notice the climate, even when our pipes burst and the garden was covered with snow. They would be there still, perhaps, if they hadn't all been killed, in one instant, by concussion from an anti-aircraft gun; for it was thus that these poor little creatures contributed to the Cause of Democracy within less than three years.

But their parents didn't join them. We gave them the chance later on. We put their cage in the aviary, we opened its door, and we left them there for a whole day. The parents, however, wouldn't come out, any more than the children were inclined to go in. For they were used to their cage, and they preferred it, so that still they came up and down with us, between Chelsea and Rooklington, and still they continued to perch on my finger for quite a long while yet.

London again, now. More dances and dance-dinners for Mary, and sometimes for Diana, as another Season began getting into its stride. But an interruption on May 6th, when Diana set off for Paris again, with both daughters, for the purpose of leaving the younger

one at the old establishment in the Avenue de la Grande Armée. Again, also, a friend and contemporary was to join it at the same time, but Anne, who had once elected to go to a boarding-school, was perfectly calm at the prospect of exile, and was finally left behind without so much as a tear. Meanwhile, in an interval between my long and peaceful hours with the dogs, I went to dine with Peter Davies, who produced the wooden box with which Barrie had first arrived in London—fifty-four years ago—and invited me to make use of its contents. It was here, then, that I found a number of unpublished typescripts, a great collection of pass-books, and—most interesting of all—the practically complete collection of little notebooks in which he had entered his ideas. I took them all home with me, and began studying them, too. The illegibility of the notebooks must have been seen to be believed, and quite a number of them were undated. But of course I had got to read them and digest them—and the typescripts and pass-books as well. It was this mass of material, and much more from other sources, that finally drove me out of my study and caused me to take over the schoolroom—though nobody else wanted it now—as a necessary method of separating the Barrieana from everything else and attaining some kind of order. But already I was beginning to realize that when I had spoken of finishing the biography in a year, I had been grossly under-estimating the labour. I had let myself in for it, though; I wasn't going to scamp it or skim it: and perhaps the Lord would provide.

On the Thursday after Diana and Mary's return from Paris, Robin Barrington-Ward lunched with me at a Club, for I was now determined, with his kind collaboration, to make use of *The Times* as well. He played up like anything, immediately lent me all their Barrie press-cuttings, and continued to solve my special problems until the last word was written. In fact, he never once suggested, incredibly busy as he always was, that *The Times* existed for anything else. He was a friend in need, and a friend indeed. But that evening, when I suppose he was toiling as hard as ever, we had a shock over another and much smaller friend. Our poor little bullfinch—Johnnie—or Bully—who had been with us since the last day of 1931, suddenly fell from his perch in the corner of the dining-room, and lay there, gasping, on the sand. We watched him, we spoke to him, and presently he tried to get up. Presently, in fact, he succeeded in getting up, but he was obviously very feeble still, we



knew he must be at least getting on for seven now, and all the symptoms seemed to point to a heart-attack. Diana took him up to her room that night, and in the small hours, as he grew feebler still, she held him in the warmth of her hand. He didn't attempt to flutter. He seemed soothed, and even grateful. But at half-past four in the morning his gay little spirit left us, and Diana wept at last, and I felt like weeping myself.

Of course he should never have been kept in a cage at all. I knew that. But I knew that he liked us, and if he had to be a prisoner, at least he was never neglected and always, from the first moment, he was loved. I thought of the hundreds of times that we had whistled together. I thought of his duets with the gramophone. I thought of Janie, his tragic bride. I remembered him here, and at Rooklington, and how Diana had always brought him fruit-blossom and other delicacies, and how once I had even plucked the grass from a grave in Brompton Cemetery so that I could stuff this, too, through his bars. Now his tiny and pathetic remains must enter a grave as well. We took him down with us that afternoon to our seaside garden, and there he was buried, and very deeply mourned. "Shall never have another," says Diana's record, though by this time it would have been illegal, even if she had been heartless enough to try. But she wasn't heartless, for she never has been. I know that she still thinks of our Bully and will never forget him. Neither shall I.

We had a call the next day, by appointment and arrangement, from E. V. Lucas, who for some years now had had a house on the other side of the downs. I had known him, again thanks to my parents, almost from childhood. As a publisher he had refused my first novel—for which I can't blame him, though I still think he gave the wrong reasons—but of late, owing to his crowded life and a growing desire to escape from something (though no one could tell whether this something were boredom or himself), our meetings had been very few. He had been Barrie's close friend, however. He had known one period, and especially one side of it, better than anyone else who was still alive. So I had written to him, and it was still an unchanging part of his nature to help anyone who was trying to write a book.

He arrived, accordingly, in a Rolls-Royce—which slightly took me aback—but in a moment, though he was heavier than when I had

first known him, he seemed almost his old self. We talked, and he told me things, and he encouraged me. Then tea came in, but he wouldn't eat anything. He said he had been having some trouble with his teeth. Suddenly I felt that he was old and ill, that perhaps I was exhausting him, and in any case that if he told me too much about the later J. M. B. while I was still investigating the one before he was born, I might be confused, or I might forget it. So I said that I should be applying to him for more details later, and he promised to give them, but seemed glad, I thought, that I had stopped teasing him now. Presently his chauffeur brought the car round, he resumed a very pale hat with an enormous brim, and thus, still rumbling at us kindly in his deep, slow tones, he re-embarked and was driven away. That was on May 14th, but I never saw him again, for shortly afterwards he entered a London nursing-home, and died there on June 26th. My consideration, my misgivings, had thrown away a chance that could never return. I tried, later on, to honour him and be just to him in the biography itself. But nothing could fill the gaps that were still left. Just as no one who remembers him, as I do, in the early years of this century, can ever forget the charm and cosy brilliance of the real E. V. L.

Another meeting, for the same purpose, with another old friend. Harley Granville-Barker was in London for a few days—his home at this period was still in France—and I pinned him down in a sitting-room at the Ritz. When I first knew him, I think we should both have been astonished to foresee the scene of this rendezvous. But here he was now, and I didn't waste time with that sort of reminiscence. We talked hard, with an eye on the clock. We went on talking as he plunged into a bedroom for his hat; as he emerged by another door—this saved him a quarter of a second, which I didn't waste, either; as we descended in the lift; as we crossed the hall; and even as he entered the taxi that was taking him to his next appointment. This energy, and this apparent preference for doing two if not three things at once, very much reminded me of the Barker of twenty-five years ago. Another scene rose up in which he was having a meal, listening to the scenario of a play being read aloud, and talking to the inescapable D. M., who was rather haunting him at the time. He used to look at me as if I puzzled him, and perhaps I did. Yet now, as I reconstruct that expression in my

memory, I feel it more likely that he was actually thinking of something else. Nevertheless, he gets a good mark for tolerating me, for occasionally swinging all his attention on me, and even, at such moments, for suddenly laughing at my jokes. I felt affectionate as that cab whisked him away. And I had also got some more material for my notes.

Diana and I spent the week-end which included my forty-sixth birthday alone together at Rooklington, for Anne, of course, was still in Paris, and Mary was again in Yorkshire. Or not alone, if you count the Pekes and the budgerigars—but Charles, for still there were other baby birds in the garden, had been left in London. A peaceful break for both of us, though I had brought a pile of books and papers down, and was still making more and more notes. There was also a plan now for a personal expedition to Kirriemuir, about which I hesitated to write without ever having seen it. And this came to fruition on June 14th, when Cynthia Asquith very kindly accompanied me, and Diana came along to Euston to see us off. From some notion which I had probably acquired by reading novels, I insisted on staying at a separate hotel, and I can't say that it was as comfortable as Cynthia's. But we spent all the day-time together, as she showed me the legendary sights, or as I absorbed still further information from two of Barrie's nieces. The thing that struck me most was the extraordinary beauty of the place, for if Barrie had ever mentioned this at all, he had somehow failed to convey it to me. I had been expecting a grey and gloomy little town, such as Scotland can certainly supply, and had assumed that it would rain all the time. But the weather was as exquisite as the scenery, the town was cheerful and pink—this being the colour of the stone in the local quarries—the natives were already singing and whistling *The Lambeth Walk*, there was a great coming and going of holiday-makers in motor-coaches, and on the second evening we actually went to a cinema. A cinema in Thrums! I was glad I hadn't relied on my imagination, though it was still needed, of course, to see this place as it had been when Barrie was born there.

I didn't waste time, for even when the kind Cynthia rested, I wandered about with one of the nieces; and when the niece retired, I immediately set forth with Cynthia again. After two full days we caught the night train back to Euston, and as I can never sleep in a sleeping-car and as there had been no real darkness in that latitude

and only a transparent blind in my hotel bedroom, I arrived home in a very notable state of fatigue. But I'd got my data and made my contacts. The notes were still piling up thick and fast. Nobody else could have understood them, and very few people could have read them. But I was getting on, I thought. Indeed, it seemed almost incredible sometimes when I compared my present knowledge with my condition at that lunch with Peter and Nico only four months ago.

Diana and Mary had again been spending the week at Ascot, and in a few more days would be starting their sessions at Wimbledon. And there was another dance-dinner. And there was another meeting—at the Great Western Hotel at Paddington, where Diana and I had begun our honeymoon—with yet another of Barrie's old friends. Constant meetings, also, between me and Peter, as I simultaneously pumped him and told him—though only now in the spirit of *absit omen*—that I knew I could never write the biography at all. He took this well, as he obligingly explored his own memory. But it was true that I had still only written one, short chapter. And now, at the end of June, the *Strand Magazine* wanted a Christmas story at once.

I hesitated; but I needed the money, I didn't want to raise difficulties with such a valuable client, and I was still funkng that plunge into Chapter Two. So I turned aside, and began writing about a snowman. And on July 2nd, while I was still doing this, our beloved Topsy had her eleventh birthday. She was all right, I thought. Her eyes were just a little mistier, but if dogs aren't taken to strange places they can manage marvellously with their other senses; and, besides, she could still see well enough. And she still played "Wuff," and she still went for walks, and she still ate heartily, and of course she was still the apple of our own eyes. I hated her being eleven, though; far more than I minded being forty-six. It was for her that I wanted time to stand still, so that always we might have her companionship, and her love, and her trust. Why couldn't dogs live longer? Why, when they slept so much, must they wear themselves out just seven times as fast as men? But they did. And I knew it. And other people were speaking of Topsy as an old dog now. Their ignorant instinct was to prefer Victoria; not that I wasn't devoted to Victoria myself. But Topsy was Topsy. Diana and I both knew this, too, though we couldn't possibly explain it. Our little dog who

had been true to us since 1927, and had seen us through everything until now. We watched her on her birthday, and had dreadful, secret pangs. But we couldn't alter what God, it seemed, had decreed.

On July 7th Anne returned, with her friend, from Paris, and there was a joint family outing, as I said before, to *Me And My Girl*; at which, on this occasion, we all laughed until we nearly choked. I had finished the short story, which was to be the last for nearly two years, and went smack into the biography in a desperate and slightly addled condition, but still upheld, to a certain extent, by the knowledge that I had at last begun. Nothing like twelve hundred words a day, though. The mere physical effort of consulting all those notes and records seemed to eat up a third of my time. And I was still conducting my investigations and researches—I should have filed, for instance, sixteen hundred letters and answers by the time the book appeared—and there could be little or no dialogue in a work like this.

Suddenly it was the Saturday of the Eton and Harrow match, and as I waited for my family to return from it, I again had that queer and regular feeling that this was the end of the year. Always I associated this Saturday evening with some mystical pause in time; and was confused, and even alarmed, because of the overwhelming revival of emotions that had been suspended since twelve months ago. They saddened me, as I sat in the dining-room window, and gazed up the street. I thought of the scent of lime-trees. I thought of Lord's cricket-ground before the last war. I thought about bicycles. And about my school, and about Oxford. And about Walpole Street. And about Pekingese puppies. Yet none of these items describes what I really thought. I was worried, and felt ridiculously lonely—though it was entirely my own fault that I hadn't gone to the match, too. Presently a taxi came slanting across the road, and as my well-dressed family climbed out of it, I rushed towards them as though for once I could express the whole thing in one gesture or word. But I couldn't, of course. In fact, I was normal now, and there was nothing whatever to express. Except my scrupulously affected interest in the result of the match, which it now seemed that Eton had again won.

Yet there was, also as usual, a kind of hurry about the last days in London. We suddenly gave a cocktail-party—though I was nearly late for it, because I was interviewing Irene Vanbrugh that day. And Mary gave a cocktail-party, with twice as many guests as at

ours; and this time, because I was dining with Peter, I had to leave before the end. And little Dorothy had lunch with me, to report progress, which was another pleasant custom in July. And her mother took me to a *matinée*. And Diana and I went to two more plays. And the Milnes had a great cocktail-party, too.

But then, sure enough, it was July 16th, and we all set off for the holiday season at Rooklington, though the car was so full of Barriana—not to mention Anne and the dogs—that Diana and Mary had to come down by train. More work, as soon as I got there. Up to London again, for a night at my cousin Di's, and a meeting with W. A. Oldfield—one of Barrie's Australian cricketing friends. Up again, at the beginning of August, for a further meeting with C. G. Macartney and his wife, whose evidence I must also secure. Very fine weather now; but more than a suggestion of thunder from Czecho-Slovakia. "Not," people were saying, because the newspapers said it, "before the harvest." But why did the newspapers keep saying this? And did they know? It was puzzling; it was alarming; it was so preposterous, if viewed without conventional preconceptions and conventional hysteria, that still, perhaps, it was just wearisome bluff and counter-bluff. The people weren't told, of course, what the oligarchs were hatching. Certainly there was more lip-service to the people in some countries than others. But that was all. Perhaps I had better take a bit of a holiday, then, as I hadn't had one for a year. So I took it, with much bathing and basking and lying about in the garden. The children's friends still came and went. And there were some family expeditions. And the newspapers were more and more ominous. And Diana had her birthday; and Rooklington had its Produce Show; and on August 22nd we all set off—for a fortnight, this time—to the hospitality at Hillside.

There was the swimming-pool, there was plenty of petrol, there were friends in various directions, there were the lovely little towns to be explored. But in all directions, too, there were preparations for new aerodromes, or bleak, flat spaces already, from which noisy monsters rose and roared. The ancient peace of the Cotswolds was shattered by this horrible invention, which must practise endlessly for war; and for a kind of war which everyone knew—because of this horrible invention—would be the most savage and destructive yet. The barest minimum of reason should have told the men whom chance had placed in power that competitive bombing and

blasting would merely add the murder of beauty and the murder of progress to the murder of human beings. But they were all afraid of each other, they must all hate and mistrust each other, and they must all make ready now to hurl their peoples into the furnace, in the name of every lofty sentiment that they could call to mind. Presently it would be the fashion, which they wouldn't discourage, to call this inevitable; to attribute it to economics, geography, history, the birth-rate, or anything but the moral cowardice that masqueraded as love of their countries. Pots would be calling kettles black at the tops of their voices. The truth would be industriously twisted until it snapped. Again the mortgaged future would be held up as the great age of hope and promise, though it was in the present that these nations must live. Again there would be the old, official assumptions that what is patriotism at home is pugnacity elsewhere; that human souls have deliberately chosen the community in which they happen to have been born; that there is no world but this world, in which all the souls would remain for ever; and that posterity is grateful to its ancestors for making fools of themselves and leaving it to pay off their debts.

But by the end of August, 1938, it wasn't only the aerodromes and aeroplanes that provoked these baffled thoughts. The wireless and the Press were announcing another crisis; the former with a slight if misleading air of detachment, the latter with a mixture of fatalism and enthusiasm which certainly did nothing to avert it. Czecho-Slovakia was still the key-word. There had been no such country when I was a child, and I am bound to say that we had all got on very well without it. But somehow it had become an entity after the last war, and though very few Englishmen could have described its constitution, or could have marked its outline on a blank map of Europe, and though even the Press was admitting that its boundaries had been rather arbitrarily drawn, if the Germans wanted it, or any part of it, we must apparently all spring to its defence. It also appeared that the French had guaranteed it—whatever that means when the guaranteed country has no sea-coast and the nearest frontier is two hundred miles away—and as it was understood that the French, in a sense, were still our allies, then in a sense we had guaranteed it, too. Must we all start a war on the Franco-German frontier, then, as we couldn't possibly start it in Czecho-Slovakia? And did this mean that Belgium would be overrun again, and that

Italy would now be our open enemy, too? What a mess. What a lot of bluffing, and lying, and painstaking misrepresentation in all quarters. What a wonderful result, for this country, of seven years under the same Government, and one which had never been elected for any such purpose as this.

The Press, again, was almost unanimous in saying that, apart from the Navy, we were totally unprepared. But they didn't tell us—and perhaps they didn't know, for after all the Foreign Office doesn't seem to have known it, either—that the French were totally unprepared, too. The Press kept telling us of the wonders of the Maginot Line, and even printed maps of it—from which it seemed obvious already, to some of us, that if this war started, the Germans would come round one end. For some of us knew what the Germans were like; that they were ruthless and efficient in warfare, and didn't think much of treaties. But the text under the maps didn't say so. Here, it said, is the part where the Germans can't come through; and here, because of their understanding with Belgium, is the part where they won't. So we'll blockade them, and they'll all starve, and they won't have any raw materials, and they'll all turn against Hitler, and Czecho-Slovakia—which was now suddenly represented as another vast military power—will be saved. And then? Well, never mind what happens then. The *status quo*, of course, but with a menace lifted and Germany in a much humbler frame of mind. Thus spake the Press, and if the Government read the newspapers, then they must either have believed them or wanted to believe them; for they seemed to be taking very much the same line themselves.

I couldn't help thinking of something else, though. I couldn't help thinking of the Uitlanders in the Transvaal in 1899, and of a parallel with the Sudeten Germans in Czecho-Slovakia now. However the Uitlanders or the Sudeten Germans had got there, the former had been held to justify invasion, so that perhaps we weren't exactly the people—whatever we might have done in the way of re-establishing partial independence afterwards—to treat its threat as such a specifically German form of outrage now. No doubt there had been genuine persecution as well as gross exaggeration of it in both cases. But if one looked at the two maps now and thought of the past history of the two countries, it hardly seemed that aggression in South Africa was the milder form of this crime. Of course it wouldn't be mild if the Germans started it now, for again we all



knew, or ought to know if we remembered anything at all, what the Germans were like. But weren't we being a bit hypocritical? Wasn't the real objection an objection to Germany being too strong? And whose fault was that? Or if it couldn't have been avoided, how much longer, how much oftener, and at what cost of unimaginable human suffering, must the smallest of all five continents continue to aim at the Balance of Power?

It all came back to the curse of nationalism, which Man should so long since have outgrown, but which must still, apparently, be preserved as an expensive and dangerous luxury, which in his more individual aspect he wasn't even allowed to enjoy. "Patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness for anyone." These words were graven on the base of a statue in the centre of London; but it wasn't only that the traffic now made it so perilous to get near them that they had been forgotten and overlooked. A human instinct also denied them, and as it was the same instinct that kept nearly forty European Governments in power, perhaps one should hardly be surprised that they fostered it. Patriotism comes first, they said, as they churned and milled together, and made and abrogated alliances, and threatened each other with war. And again, I suppose, they were summoning the heads of their armed forces, and these heads were automatically informing them that they and their men were ready to the last button. For if they said anything else, they might have been sacked. Though only in one country, at this period, was the statement even approximately true.

So that was that. But though I don't like the Germans myself, or other foreigners, or a very considerable number of my own countrymen, I have never regarded this feeling as a virtue, of which I or anyone else should boast. I have never thought this a good reason why we should all start killing each other, or destroying each other's property. Rather I have regarded it as a feeling that one should endeavour to suppress and overcome, for we are not our brothers' keepers in that sense, and there has always been plenty of muddle and cruelty to be cleared up at home. If I don't like my neighbour, or if he doesn't like me, we are still not justified in shooting at each other or even breaking each other's windows. That's axiomatic. Or if two big companies or corporations are rivals, they are still not justified in slaughtering each other's workmen or burning each other's works. Though they can amalgamate, if they like, and in

fact they often do. But when it comes to nations, there are no moral standards, it seems, and anything goes. Murder, devastation, lying, and financial dishonesty are now all sanctified by something called the State. What is it? If you ask me, I think it is an invention of the Devil himself. For the only alternative is that God created men in order to make wars, and though I am not prepared to say what their real purpose is, I cannot and will not believe it to be that.

I lived in something of a nightmare, then—though I wasn't the only sufferer, by a very long chalk—during that fortnight at Hill-side. And when we all returned to Rooklington, in the first week of September, the tension, as everyone knows now, was even worse. It was on the same day that *Morning, Noon and Night* was published, and if the *Anschluss* had been bad for *London Lovers*, I can only say that in the present situation one might as well have shut up shop. My publishers, who had just paid me a large advance, would of course suffer more than I did. But if people read more in war-time, they certainly don't when war is threatened; or certainly they are not interested in light, clean fiction. A lot of other novels were held up until the crisis had passed; but by that time my own novel was no longer the latest, and as the flood broke loose again it had very little chance. No, I wasn't a best-seller in September, 1938: but I wasn't worrying particularly about that. I was thinking, like everyone else, of the crisis. I was peering everywhere for even one realist or man of goodwill. I couldn't see him. I could only see a black and disastrous future. Yet as my holiday was over now, at least I could and did hurl myself back into my work.

My account-book reminds me of much, but it seems that I couldn't allude to anything in such a manner as to reveal what was in my thoughts. Anyone who read it, or could fathom my handwriting, would gain no notion of those dreadful weeks; for if I say, for instance, that Diana and Anne and I made an expedition to Winchelsea, I haven't added that two of us were so wretched and miserable that we could hardly speak. But Diana's engagement-book tells rather more, and it is from this that I am now taking some further details. On September 12th it was a relief to have Mary back from another visit. On September 13th her special friend came to join us, so as to be out of London. On September 14th I read, and am prepared to confirm, that "everything looks awful." On September 15th

the Prime Minister made his first flight to Germany; and returned next day, but the tension was as acute as ever.

More doubts, more fears, more almost insupportable anxiety. It was said that he might be going back again, and as long as he could keep this up there was a flicker of hope. On September 20th I declined to accompany the rest of the household to the Brighton Hippodrome, where another Palladium revue was being tried out, on the grounds that my depression would probably wreck the evening. But they all went, while I sat at home with the dogs, and Diana reports that it took her mind off Europe.

On September 22nd the Prime Minister made his second flight. We held our breaths for two days this time, but again there was no real break in the dark clouds. We decided, not unreasonably, to postpone our return to Chelsea; while Anne's return to Paris was no longer even discussed. Still and always the Cabinet was said to be sitting, but the people here and everywhere else could only guess at their fate. The outlook was becoming more and more alarming, and on September 27th Diana and I suddenly leapt into the Citroën, and drove up to Chelsea, with a view to collecting a few valuables—including the rest of my Barrieana—and a modicum of winter clothes. At Croydon men were blacking out the traffic-lights, and a little further on we began passing them at work on trenches. We fell in with Alan Milne in Mallord Street, and all had a gloomy lunch together at a restaurant in Sloane Square. Then we turned round, and drove back to Rooklington—with the surviving goldfish much on my mind, though we couldn't take him with us, and knew that at present he was still going to be fed. But the news was, if possible, even worse than a few hours ago.

And worse still in the morning. An ominous deadlock everywhere. Hungary—or its Government—wanted a bit of Czecho-Slovakia now. So did Poland—which in six months would be generally represented to us as another democracy, though in fact it had given all that up two years ago and more, and might now be much more accurately described as a military dictatorship. There were charming Hungarians and there were charming Poles. But there didn't seem to be any charming Governments.

The more one looked at those maps of Czecho-Slovakia, the more one wondered how on earth it had ever come into being as an independent state. What a shape. And what a name. I don't think

it unfair to say that for at least nineteen years after the previous war only a very few of the compulsorily-educated in this country had managed to distinguish between Czecho-Slovakia and Jugo-Slavia. Surely even an unnecessary country should have a better name than these.

Flashback to the summer of 1914, which indeed, as the glorious, crisis weather continued day after day, was much in such memories as mine. There was a popular, blackmailing scoundrel in those days, who was subsequently imprisoned and ruined, and no doubt should have been both already, but at the moment was editing a weekly with the biggest circulation of all. Do you remember Horatio Bottomley's *John Bull* placard in that week of ultimatums? "To Hell with Serbia," it said. And it was he—if nations there had got to be—who was speaking for the British people then. But it was no good. Their Government, though still vacillating, was obsessed with the Balance of Power and the Foreign Office outlook; and Serbia became Serbia, and an ally, and was wiped out, and rose again in a different shape and with a new title. And Bottomley, of course, became as warlike as anyone in a few more days, and made a packet of money out of it, too, until he was nabbed and gaoled. But there didn't seem to be even a Bottomley to express what millions were feeling now. A plague, they were feeling, not only on both your houses but on the whole damned lot of them. Yet the Press was still talking in terms of power-politics and prestige. And the millions were beginning to think that there was no other honourable way out.

On the next day, which was Thursday, September 29th, we were summoned to the little school-house—where the Produce Shows were held—in order to be fitted with gas-masks. A fumbling stranger, in an old Etonian tie, had arrived with the three sample sizes, and the villagers and the rest of us must take it in turn to inhale each other's breaths. "Disgusting," says Diana's entry, and I quite agree with her. The villagers looked half-bewildered and half-contemptuous—as though saying to themselves (which they probably were) that a Government that could do this was capable of any fantastic absurdity; but we all did our duty, and were partially suffocated, and came thoughtfully away. The sensation of this business was the discovery that one of our maidservants had a head, though it appeared to be quite normal, which none of the three sizes would fit. The old Etonian was stymied, fumbled more than ever—

for he must have left school at least forty years ago—and spoke vaguely of a special mask being made. But I don't know if it ever was, for the maidservant had left us before the next crisis came round.

This was the day, also, when the Prime Minister suddenly informed the House of Commons, after some more desperately gloomy speeches, that he had been invited to Germany yet again. And that the French Prime Minister was also going. And that this time Signor Mussolini was to be there as well. It was the eve, in other words, of the Munich agreement, about which I was such a pessimist that I made Diana listen to the wireless because I couldn't stand any more of its inflexions myself. But I wasn't sneering at Neville Chamberlain, whatever I had thought of him hitherto, or should be driven into thinking later on. I saw him, and still see him, as a realist in that hour, and as a courageous realist, too. I could feel no shame because the meeting wasn't being held in London or Paris. I didn't care twopence where it was being held, if only other realists were present, and if only, among them, they could at last muster a little human goodwill. For I still couldn't see why if the French were unable to implement their own provocative foreign policy, there should be a world-wide rain of bombs. All this, of course, should have been foreseen and dealt with months if not years ago, during which our responsible public servants had had all the information at their disposal that anyone could possibly want. But as it hadn't been, I was backing and praying for the man who was facing the facts. And as everyone knows, he returned next day with a piece of paper and a declaration, both of which seemed much too good to be true.

They needn't have been. If his strength had lasted, if his mind had been more elastic, if he had sacked the entire Foreign Office and all our ambassadors, and if he had insisted on more and more meetings being held until something was really settled that might possibly last our time, I think he could have brought it off. I think the shouts of the people in Downing Street that night, which were afterwards described as so hysterical and shameless, but at that moment were being echoed all over Europe, were evidence enough that he would have found support, if only something had been done. Yet almost immediately there were other voices, to make him hesitate and finally to rob him of his triumph. Elderly voices, I discovered, were

particularly indignant with him for not having plunged them into war. They went about saying that they couldn't hold their heads up, though I was still convinced that they didn't know where Czecho-Slovakia was. They had seen *Cavalcade*, perhaps, and thought that the world was like that.

Then, to their great satisfaction, the First Lord of the Admiralty resigned. I have not yet heard it suggested that he was a good First Lord, though as a good First Sea Lord is much more important, and as he had only been in office just over a year, perhaps he hadn't done much harm. But I don't think he did much good when he struck that blow in favour of a war which the country didn't want, and for which the competent authorities were quite unprepared. Later, of course, he could say "I told you so," because later, largely owing to his own action, the war would again be inevitable. But I shouldn't call him a realist. And already the other, temporary realist was having to fight, as it were, on two fronts. For already, everywhere, the men of ill-will were coming into their own again, and planning more devilry. As some of them looked across the North Sea and saw this country still wrangling over Munich and apparently doing nothing else, the temptation was a great deal more than they could possibly resist.

It was a relief, though—and that's a mild word for it—in these first days and weeks when one could still hope. We needn't have rushed up to London, it seemed, though having altered all plans we couldn't immediately return there. I admit that I found it easier to work, though I had never actually stopped. And Anne could have her second term in Paris, after all, though she would have missed the first fortnight. And perhaps, if only a few people came to their senses, she could have her first Season, too. Why not? Was that going to hurt anyone? With all my Nonconformist ancestry, I couldn't see it. But her friend wouldn't be returning, for another and very sad reason, so that when the time came there would be no joint celebration at anything corresponding to *Me And My Girl*.

There was a fearful gale, lasting three days and nights, at the beginning of October, which was attributed by some of those elderly women to God's displeasure over Munich, and in any case drove me back to Chelsea, with all my Barrieana and my winter overcoat, before the establishment was ready to receive the others. Well, I had to see Peter again, and other people, and I had to get nearer a good

library, and anyhow I wasn't alone for long. Fishwick, the goldfish, was all right. The trench-digging had been suspended, though many beautiful London trees would never recover from it—even if it hadn't presently been resumed. I gathered from voices at my Clubs that the Prime Minister's stock was already falling, but I hoped that these voices weren't really representative, and still—foolishly, I suppose—I was hoping that the date of the next international meeting would be announced.

I also had tea with the Douglasses in their doll's-house, where thank Heaven the situation was hardly discussed at all. And then I drove down to Rooklington for a last, short week-end, and brought all my family back. And the Pokes, of course. And Charles. And the parent budgerigars. And all was as it had been until the following Saturday, when Diana took Anne back to Paris, dropped her there with instructions that she was to be returned at the first sign of any fresh crisis, and returned on the Monday herself.

"What were the French like?" I asked.

"Just the same as usual," said Diana. "They all seemed quite cheerful and calm."

In further conversation with her, and subsequently with Anne, I gathered that the French—or the French whom they met—were of opinion that there had been a good deal of fuss about nothing; which considering their own responsibility was certainly cheerful and calm. I understood, also, that they agreed with Hitler about Jews. That they thought the British a more disturbing element than the Germans. That they had no particular objection to Mussolini. And that they thought the Americans were apt to presume on the fact that they were still much too rich. I didn't feel it my duty to pass this information on to the British Government, who after all kept an Embassy in Paris and were spending £350,000 a year on their Secret Service. But it looks now as if either they didn't know it, or wouldn't believe what they were told. I think this should perhaps be remembered in the middle of everything else.

It seemed almost a normal autumn again, except that I was working upstairs in the schoolroom now, and instead of pursuing fiction was trying to avoid it in every line I wrote. The big drop in my income wasn't unduly apparent yet, because of what I had managed to save. But I knew there must be no more extravagance; and there

wasn't very much. We had all had a bad jolt at the end of September, and I didn't trust the human race; for with all its remarkable qualities it was as obviously unfitted to lead as it was so much too easily led. I knew now that it was stupid, quarrelsome, and improvident. Yet the general impression still seemed to be that I belonged to it. If so, I couldn't escape its punishments. So that for me, in this mood, and I dare say for others in their own set of cells, there was still far too often a roll of approaching thunder and a horrid heaviness in the air.

I bent over my desk, with those books and papers all round me; or when I came downstairs again, I tried to pretend that we were all so much safer than we were. It was certainly normal that I caught another cold, and went to the dentist, and changed my library books, and pottered round the block with my dogs. It wasn't abnormal, and again one could forget the shadows, when Dot took us to another play, and we stood her supper afterwards. It was only a slight change in the routine that I was still keeping in close touch with so many of Barrie's old friends. In fact, this part of the job was undoubtedly good for me, for the years of fiction had made me an increasing hermit.

We went to Rooklington at the beginning of November, for another long week-end. It was near enough Lewes—which was the headquarters of all Guy Fawkes celebrations—to have more than the customary outburst of fireworks. And poor little Victoria, who would be so brave in the first London air-raids, was terrified of the bangs, and escaped, and bolted, and was found nearly half a mile away in a neighbour's house. They had never noticed her creeping in, but we had suspected this possibility, and were soon on her track. I didn't feel nearly so fond of fireworks after that.

Back to Chelsea. Diana in bed now with a chill. And the biographer off to Jesus College, Cambridge, as the guest, for biographical purposes, of Q—or Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch—who had known J. M. B. since 1890, or thereabouts, and had enough memories and letters to make the visit very well worth while. He put me up in his spare room there, fed me, gave me any amount to drink, and took me to dine at the high table in hall. I liked him enormously, and as I had just looked him up in *Who's Who* I was able to arrive with an apposite birthday present. But I didn't see much of Cambridge, for it rained the whole time I was there. I remember great



kindness, though, from all the assembled dons. I was even shown their new air-raid shelters, for Munich hadn't put a stop to that.

Quite the contrary. On the day after my return to Chelsea the Government announced that they were spending twenty million pounds, though not out of their own pockets, on what would become known as Anderson Shelters; and presently, as I travelled by train between London and Splashcliff, I would see them lying about in the little suburban back-gardens. Very few recipients of these gifts seemed as yet to be making any further use of them. I suppose they thought that their own and other Governments had more sense or sense of responsibility than would actually prove to be the case.

Towards the end of the month Diana paid another visit to Anne in Paris, and took her out, and stuffed her with food, and came home again. Still reporting that the French were calm and cheerful, and being particularly struck by their broad-mindedness about dogs in restaurants. And early in December, as usual without the slightest warning, she suddenly returned from a morning's shopping with yet another bird. This was hardly in accordance with the pledge that she had taken when Bully died. But then the new bird was a Yorkshire Canary, unquestionably born and bred in captivity; and anyhow here he was. Very large and rather awkward-looking, and never as intelligent as his predecessor, though soon he began singing loudly and gaily enough. I named him Goliath, which in a few days became abbreviated to Golly, and we were very fond of him, as once more there were two bird-cages in the dining-room window. But he only stayed with us for eighteen months, for it was then, owing to the war, that we became temporarily homeless, and he and the parent budgerigars had all to be taken over by carefully-selected friends. Very sad. Poor little birds. But there was nothing else that we could do.

Anne returned, in bitterly cold weather, on December 17th. Her term had started late, but she had been able to stay to the end, and now, like Mary, she was at least theoretically "finished." She looked much the same, that's to say, and in many respects was still not exactly grown-up. But there would be no more education in the strictly professional sense, and if Fate only allowed she would soon be at dances, too. In any case, the full family had reassembled once more, and Christmas was very much in the air. I bought some coloured lights for our little Christmas-tree, and to hang in a festoon

in the hall—where at the end of 1938 they could still send a warm glow through the fanlight over the front door. And it started snowing. And news came from Rooklington that all our pipes had burst. This was annoying, for it was the supposed duty of a couple in the village to empty the system when frosts were about. But they had gone off for a week-end holiday themselves, the frost had come in the middle of it, and when they returned it was too late. So the Splashcliff builder must pull the floors up, and his plumber must set to work with a blow-lamp and solder, as in London more snow still fell.

A lunch-party, on the snowy Christmas Day itself, of relations at Church Street—or Old Church Street, if the authorities preferred. Dinner with Diana's parents, while I wondered if the Citroën would freeze outside. And then the thaw. And then off to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* again, which had been revived with—to my great pleasure—little Dorothy in the part of Titania. Again I was enchanted and overwhelmed. Again the stalls talked during the overture and intermezzos, while the gallery gave them a silent and unappreciated lesson from above. And little Dorothy looked lovely, though we found her shivering in her dressing-room afterwards, and indeed the back-stage accommodation at the Old Vic seemed more like a warehouse than a theatre. "Happy New Year," we said; and left her. For we were going down to Rooklington ourselves.

The house was still full of workmen when we arrived. The ceilings were stained, though these marks would gradually disappear—or perhaps it was that we got used to them. Snow had come through the roof. And a bowl-light hanging in the hall was still full of water. But we lit more fires and harried the workmen, and the boards in Anne's bedroom were nailed down again, and she was able to sleep there after all. My recording thermometer in the Gothic porch showed twelve degrees of frost, and though this record would be beaten in war-time, when we couldn't get any coal and the pipes burst again, it had been the worst frost so far in all our five years.

Then it was New Year's Eve, which ended for us at an evening party with Diana's aunts and cousins. Personally, I was so sleepy, for some reason—but never had I worked harder than over that biography—that it was all I could do to keep awake. This is no reflection on the hospitality or on the juvenile charades, and of course I roused myself at midnight for toasts and Auld Lang Syne.

Yet never, again, hitherto, had there been a more horrible year. And indeed it was hard to feel any confidence as the circumstances forced one to look ahead. The drift had been resumed. One knew that; if, in fact, it weren't already more than a drift. I was lucky, I supposed, to have a long, big task on hand, which as I now realized would carry me well into 1940. It was lucky, also, that I had saved enough to make this extension possible. But one looked in vain for other signs of luck; for there was no real peace on earth now, and hardly a vestige of goodwill. Was it possible that by this time next year the drift could conceivably have been stemmed? I doubted it, and God knows that I was right to doubt it, for there were madmen at the helm everywhere, and however much they insulted each other, they were all mad in the same way. They could force their madness on others, by the old, familiar tricks. They were doing it already. They had been doing it for months and years. And when the thing blew up, if anyone resisted them, it would be he who would be called mad. In fact, I was in a vast lunatic-asylum. And it wasn't even safe.

"Good-night," everyone was saying. "Good-night," I was saying, too. We made our way out to the car again, packed ourselves in, and I drove home. I switched off, I locked up the garage, I made my way in by the front door. Topsy and Victoria had spent the evening together in the drawing-room, but Diana had let them out while I was putting the car away, and now they were both springing about in the hall and waving their tails. Our dear little dogs. What on earth was going to happen to them? I wondered. I was haunted by their touching ignorance and innocence, and by their hideously misplaced trust in mankind. It was a long time, in spite of my previous somnolence, before I could fall asleep.

## CHAPTER XIII

1939

ON January 4th, 1939, I took myself up to London, partly to get on with my work there and partly because my bed at Rooklington was needed for a young gentleman. In other words, my daughter Anne was to burst on the world, as an 'ostensibly finished article, at the Southdown Hunt Ball—to be held at a floodlit house near Lewes on

January 6th—and for this purpose our own house was to be crammed to what you might call capacity. Perhaps I should have refused to leave, and have attended the Ball, and beamed on my sixteen-year-old child—seventeen next week, though—in her new dress. But nobody by now expected me to do anything of the sort; either I or the young gentleman would in that case have had nowhere to sleep; and when I learnt afterwards that the revelry had continued until nearly half-past four, I saw less reason than ever for regret.

So I was sitting in the schoolroom at 107, Old Church Street, on the morning of January 5th, when the telephone, which was now installed there, began to ring, and I lifted the receiver, and it seemed that I was speaking to Mrs. Bernard Shaw. This wasn't entirely unexpected; for not only had I first become acquainted with her and her husband something like twenty-five years ago, but I had written to her quite recently for some information which I wanted for my book. G. B. S. could have supplied it, too, but I knew that he had been ill not so very long ago, I was well aware of his overwhelming benevolence—some manifestation of which it is almost impossible for any correspondent to spare him—so that I had decided to trouble Mrs. Shaw instead. She had replied promptly and accurately, unlike so many of my other victims, and of course I had thanked her. And now she was asking Diana and myself to lunch.

Well, Diana was down in the country, being benevolent herself; so I explained this; and a few hours later I turned up at Whitehall Court alone. It was a long, long time since I had seen either of the Shaws—not because of the faintest cloud, but merely because when people are as kind as that and everyone else wants to see them, there is always something in my nature that makes me hang back. But neither of them seemed to have altered in any way. G. B. S. was perhaps a little whiter, but his step was as elastic as ever, and neither his voice nor the things that it said had changed. Mrs. Shaw was still calm, soothing, and delightful. There was another guest—a woman whom I never quite placed; which was no doubt her exact feeling about me—but there wasn't so much as a moment of awkwardness or strain. G. B. S. entertained us both, and made us both laugh. He knew just what to say to the woman, and just what to say to me. Mrs. Shaw was herself; I can think of no more flattering description than that. And the lunch was admirable, though of course the host must still have his vegetarian dishes, as he always had.

Presently we were in the big drawing-room, overlooking the Embankment and a vast space where the Government had destroyed Richmond Terrace and was preparing to erect new offices for its myrmidons. And still we talked, and still I should have purred, if I had possessed this gift, at all the kindness that I was shown. Perhaps I ought to go now. But I was told not to. So I stayed a bit longer, as the host still ranged over a vast number of topics, and as we each spoke of other old friends. Somehow he had now got on to William Morris, whom I could barely remember but whom he had once known so well. And suddenly he was out of the room, and then back again with a little book that he had written on the subject—though as a matter of fact it is almost entirely about himself—and he was offering it to me as a gift. Naturally I thanked him. Then he took it away, and wrote both our names and the date in it, and gave it me back. And then I insisted on going, for the old inhibition was again very hard at work. But G. B. S. insisted on taking me along the corridor and waiting with me for the lift.

"Come again," he said; just as J. M. B. had said so often. I thanked him once more. I told him that I should certainly come again, and I meant to, and always I was going to suggest myself and of course, as she had been invited this time, Diana, too. But first I thought it was too soon. Then we had worries and troubles. Always, alas, my hand dropped from the telephone, as the inhibition arose. And then the war began, and it seemed just out of the question to take advantage of anyone now. I hope the Shaws didn't think me ungrateful. I couldn't possibly explain to them that it was their own kindness which made me so backward and shy. It is also, of course, quite conceivable that neither of them, with all their interests and all their friends and acquaintances, ever noticed my absence or thought of me again. But I have often cursed the inhibition, for I am absolutely devoted to them both. I know that for all those years I could have infested the premises if I had chosen to do so, and of course I'm a fool to have missed a chance like that. But it can't be helped now. It was the way I was made.

On the following Monday my family returned, with glowing accounts of the festivities, and at once and henceforth Diana began hurling herself into the organization and preparation for Anne's forthcoming Metropolitan *début*. Again, soon enough, there would be the tea-parties and the fork-lunches, all leading towards the dance-

dinners and the dances themselves. Again her engagement-book would become full of names which, familiar or not, meant little or nothing to her husband. Again there were confabulations with other mothers and chaperons. Again my telephone-account would begin soaring, as they all exchanged dates and lists. And of course Anne must be Presented by her mother, too. What, I asked nervously, about our own contribution to Vanity Fair? Would it be enough if our child were provided with dresses, taxi-fares, and shampoos and permanent waves, and if we were constantly feeding young people on whom we had never set eyes before? Or had we got to go all out again, and beggar ourselves with another Ball?

To my shameful relief, I was told that this wouldn't be necessary. It appeared—and I can well believe it—that Diana's standing with the other hostesses was now so sound and firm, and that she was still going to give so many dinners, that Anne could follow in Mary's footsteps with no reflection on our honour. Good. I felt a bit of a cur for not being a rich stockbroker; but it was too late to change now; and indeed, whether we said this or not, we both knew that if there were a Season at all this year, it would probably be the last.

On Tuesday, January 10th, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary set off for Paris and Rome. I approved the latter destination, not that I had for a moment approved the Italian treatment of Abyssinia, and even wished that the travellers had started sooner. For if they couldn't alter past history, at least and surely it was better to risk a snub on their arrival than to sit at home writing Notes. It was a pity, of course, that they hadn't got more brains; but I hoped they would be realists again. I hoped that Signor Mussolini would be a realist, too. But of course I should never be told what really happened, let alone what the principal characters had in their minds. In this matter, which affected everyone's future so closely, all over the globe, I was just one of two thousand million nobodies. I could look at news-reel pictures, and I must go on paying exorbitant taxes, but my fate was in the hands of men whom I had never even met. It's their extraordinary conceit that still puzzles me, and always will. Not one of them could personally have organized even a small bazaar. They relied for everything on secretaries and subordinates. But a mixture of chance and over-developed ambition had tossed them into power, and they didn't hesitate to use the lives and fortunes of others as stakes in a secret game. The British emissaries might

take more trouble to conceal this, and might even themselves believe that guarded statements in the two Houses of Parliament—only one of which was even theoretically democratic—were the same thing as consulting the common people and telling them the truth. Or again they might reasonably say that no business can be conducted if forty million shareholders insist on attending every board meeting. But hadn't they ever heard of limited liability? Didn't they realize that we *were* shareholders, willy-nilly, from the cradle to the grave? Apparently not. They accepted the position, we couldn't alter it, and so this mischief went on.

A very much pleasanter occurrence on the same date was that Plum Wodehouse suddenly rang me up, and it seemed that he was over in London again, and that I had caught him this time, for the purpose of his action was to ask me out to lunch. So we lunched at the Savoy, almost but not quite on the scene of our first evening together—very much the best part of twenty years ago. But then it had been the Grill-Room, and now, for some Plummish reason, it was the Restaurant, where the sight of two authors alone at one table is much more rare. However, he hadn't changed, either, and I didn't really mind where we were—not that I had the slightest objection to succulent luxury—so long as we could go on talking just where we had left off. And this we did, though it was far too long since our last meeting, for we were still friends and we had been corresponding, at intervals, all the time. We reviewed literature. We discussed our own and each other's works. And of course we had a great deal to say about Pokes. Gradually the big restaurant emptied, but still we sat on; and I asked about the French again, and received much the same report as I had been given by Diana three months ago. I thought: "I wonder if I'd care to be settled in France myself." But I didn't say so, for Plum, presumably, knew much more about it, and, besides, it was entirely his own and his wife's affair. And of course they would nip out if there were any real danger. Naturally. Who wouldn't? Or who wouldn't, except the Wodehouses, when the danger came?

We were out in the Strand. We began walking, until the point at which he again vanished. But I hadn't quite lost him yet, for about a week later, on the eve of their departure, Anne and I looked in on both Wodehouses at a furnished flat which they had taken in Berkeley Square. They gave us drinks, and we talked and laughed,

until I had to rush off and collect Diana for another dinner with Peter that night. Again the door of a lift was the scene of another parting. It closed. We descended. And the next time I heard those mild and familiar tones was in August, 1941, when Diana suddenly roused me from sleep and rushed me to the radio. She had been twiddling knobs, and Plum's voice—doubly removed, for it was a record that was being played over—was addressing us from Germany, where he had recently emerged from forty-nine weeks of internment. I was much moved, but I can't say that I was indignant. He was being funny; I thought he was being remarkably courageous; he seemed to be making a quiet and almost casual plea against intolerance. But this didn't stop a Minister of Information from over-riding the authorities at the B. B. C., and putting up a journalist to blackguard him in another broadcast, to sneer at his Christian names, and to describe him as a "playboy." Plum! The most industrious author that I had ever known. But the war couldn't go on without hatred, and Plum hated no one. That was his crime. He had had his punishment. It wasn't enough for that Minister of Information, who must order more hatred to be poured into a million homes. Yet it wasn't only an old friend, with a detestation for injustice, who was appalled and ashamed.

We celebrated Anne's seventeenth birthday, on January 12th, by a family evening at the Gaiety Theatre, where Leslie Henson—another figure in my own past history—could still make us all laugh. And two days later Mary, subsidized by her mother, set off again for Kitzbühel with another party of friends, for a visit of two or three weeks. In a sense she was going to Austria, but in another sense she was going to Germany, and in any case would be travelling through it, so that again there must be instructions and arrangements as to what to do if the cauldron boiled over. In fact, I didn't want her to go at all, and I knew that Diana was only being unselfish. But she went. She found the Austrians, or ex-Austrians, as fascinating as they notoriously appear to all girls of that age, and didn't seem to have had any trouble with the Germans, either. There was nothing but friendship and civility. So was she, perhaps, a better ambassador than Sir Nevile Henderson, or should all ambassadors and ministers retire at twenty-five, and those who have supplied them with their credentials, too? I'd risk it myself. I don't see how the young could make a worse mess of things than their elders. And somehow, if



left to themselves, I don't see them either preparing or declaring war. What are late hours and too much dance-music when set against that? Well, anyhow, Mary had a glorious time.

At home I was working. I was cross-examining the long-suffering A. E. W. Mason again, and being given a terrific tea. I was cross-examining or trying to cross-examine Sir Seymour Hicks—for of course he did nearly all the talking—to the accompaniment of further refreshments at our Club. And I was interviewing Rupert D'Oyly Carte, whose father had once employed Barrie as a librettist, in his office at the Savoy Hotel. Rather a thrill to go behind the scenes like this, and I was strongly tempted to drop my biographical inquiries, and to get right down (like Arnold Bennett) to an inspection of the kitchens and the wine-cellars. But though Mr. D'Oyly Carte was kind, he was also obviously busy, and having extracted the information that I had come for, and having borrowed his very rare copy of that libretto, I departed and left him in peace.

It looks, from the evidence of that last paragraph, as though by the end of January, 1939, I had brought my rough draft to somewhere in the early 'nineties; and I expect this was the case. But there was a long way to go still. That precipice still towered over me, and even while I was clambering up one bit of it, I often had to go back and repair or smoothe over an earlier stage or phase. I was still, also, corresponding like a fury. But there was a kind of impetus now. I was still, perhaps, barely a third of the way through the book. But I hadn't stuck yet, and of course I knew at least the rest of the outline now.

Four days before Mary's return from Austria there was another sudden blow. Diana's father was again taken seriously ill. A doctor, a specialist, and nurses were all in attendance, and his condition was so alarming that each day we must all hold our breath. Presently his enormous courage and determination would bring him into quieter waters, but not until there had been relapses, and not for a long time yet. So Diana, as well as taking care of me and arranging for Anne's Presentation and all the rest of it, must constantly be going over to Kensington, and frequently twice a day. For the good wife and the good mother was still the best of all daughters. Eventually, also, it would be possible for the invalid to be moved down to Hillside, though still there must be two nurses and still my mother-in-law must support an unbearable strain; and of course Diana—being

Diana—must keep on joining them there for a night as well. All this would be weighing on her for many a long month yet, and no one could lighten the load. If there had been no war in 1939, we should still look back on it with the memory of extraordinary oppression, and anxiety, and fatigue. But of course there was always this other threat as well.

The results of that visit to Rome were boomed by the Press, but there was little enough that any reader could really take hold of. The leaders were said to have smiled at each other, which was something, and the visitors, it was reported, had been cheered. But a few days later the British Government was still announcing further plans in the event of hostilities, and though Hitler's annual speech on January 30th is described in Diana's engagement-book as "pretty dull, thank goodness," we all still knew, or at any rate had been told often enough, that wars always waited for the harvest. For it is the theory that each fresh war will always be over by Christmas, though it certainly doesn't seem to be the practice, and it is thus that we are taught to regard the gifts of God.

On February 10th we snatched a week-end at Rooklington, and had some fine weather, too. On the Monday the Government announced a plan for founding fifty camps, to be used for evacuation in war-time and as school holiday centres in peace-time; but if they were ever constructed, I haven't heard of this yet. It was another sign, though; and as Diana and I looked at each other in London, and examined our joint income—of which my half was suffering so severely from the biography—and tried to peer ahead, we suddenly decided to tell the house-agents that Church Street could be let or sold. We hated the idea, but we had to face facts. And one fact seemed to be that the sixty-three-year lease of a modern house on which we had lavished attention and improvements, far in excess of any legal necessity, was an asset that might be put to some use. It was also the truth, though we weren't going to say too much about this to the agents, that each year since we had been here, and with a marked increase of late, the traffic in front had become heavier and noisier. So perhaps we would find a quieter as well as a cheaper house elsewhere. Or perhaps we could find a flat, into which we could just cram, and make Rooklington our more permanent headquarters. It seemed worth trying, anyhow, for of course we must be practical and economical if we could.

So I felt a terrible wrench, and Diana called on the house-agents, and they took down the details, and flooded us with particulars of flats. But though, so far as I can remember, two people took the trouble to look over our happy and comfortable and well-equipped home, not a single offer was made. They wouldn't rent it, and still less would they buy it, for as the agents now admitted they were all scared of the war. They wanted flats that they could lock up and leave. Or they wanted furnished houses that they could skip out of, with no further responsibility, at the first alarm. But seven and a half years of the National Government had killed the ordinary market for medium-sized London houses, and though it hadn't yet resulted in their being blown to bits, my investment of fourteen years ago—which was then said to be the best that anyone could make—was on the way to becoming a millstone round my neck. This was all right for the Communists, but the Government seemed to hate them even more than the Fascists; and, moreover, I didn't consider myself to be either. I don't deny that there was a selfish and mistaken sense of relief, for what 107, Old Church Street meant to me I have tried to describe—and no one will ever know. But as I went on my walks now, I could see that the agents were right. Boards everywhere. The scarlet superscription of "Let" or "Sold" so rare as to make me rub my eyes when I saw it. But then there were also notices saying "To the Shelter," and it hardly seemed likely that they had been put there just for fun.

The nightmare had begun, and there was no way out of it. So I went on working, and Diana went on visiting her father and mother, and Anne went out dancing, and Mary, too, as often as not, though she was now also attending a life-class at the Chelsea Polytechnic. And still we had two dogs, and a cat, and two budgerigars—but there was no weakness about the nesting-box this year—and a canary, and a goldfish. So perhaps it was rather crazy to imagine that we could ever live in a flat at all.

At the end of February my researches brought a delightful visit from Cyril Maude and his wife, who I hope didn't realize that I was asleep on the drawing-room sofa when they were announced. My excuse is that having heard they were in London, I had suggested calling on them, but Cyril Maude's kindness had sent him round instantly and without warning. So I sprang to my feet, he told me a great deal that was extremely interesting, and two years later he

rewarded my efforts with three appreciative letters in swift succession—which would make any author attached to him, and certainly had this effect on me. Once more, how unbelievably patient and helpful all these old friends were.

I had tea with another at the beginning of March, on the day after the Prime Minister had made a startling appearance at a reception at the Russian Embassy; though why on earth shouldn't he? The old friend, in this case, was Miss Violet Vanbrugh, who had starred in a Barrie play that most people, I am afraid, had forgotten, but about which I must again learn everything that I could. I knew her sister and her brother, and for their sake, but also, of course, for Barrie's, she instantly treated me as an old friend, too. More questions, and answers, and notes. The play had been produced in 1900, and though I hadn't got there yet, I was ready for the information now. And I received it, and was grateful for it, and stored it away on the files.

I see, also, that Diana and I took both dogs to Wimbledon Common next day, which not only suggests that the weather was fine, but that Topsy was still capable of this kind of outing. If I close my eyes, I can still see her trotting along those footpaths, or Victoria lying in wait for her and suddenly butting her in the ribs. Then they would both travel back on Diana's lap, and we would all feel virtuous, and they would be offered milk for their tea. Yes, Topsy was still well enough, for a dog of eleven and a half, in the early spring of this year. Though always there was that other thought in our minds.

More dance-dinners on the programme now, but if I preferred to escape them, as I fear I still did, Diana must again go through everything, as she had done for Mary, and again she must sit up until long after midnight, whatever she had been doing for her parents that day. On March 9th, when she had arranged for Anne's Presentation, her father had another bad relapse, and until he was able to insist on their going we had quite thought that the whole thing must be off. But Diana went through with it, and exhibited her younger daughter to Their Majesties (while the band played a tune called *Mine Alone*), and Mary and I spent a less exalted evening at a farce. So that, threats or no threats, I now had two daughters who had made their loyal curtsseys. And Diana had done her exhausting duty again.

There was still much anxiety over her father, and we cancelled

arrangements for what was to have been a quiet week-end at Rooklington, while she did her other duty and he had a further relapse. But on the Monday he was slightly better. On the Tuesday the social round was resumed. And on the Wednesday the German troops and Herr Hitler entered Prague. The Prime Minister told the House of Commons that he couldn't regard this as in accord with the spirit of the Munich agreement; but I don't know that anyone was particularly surprised, for again there had been a week of crisis already, with no sign of any firm stand by the French. Some of my compatriots seemed pleased rather than otherwise that the agreement was now dead, but they also used the word "betrayal"; and again one couldn't help wishing that someone would look at a map. The German method had certainly been intolerable, but it had also been hideously efficient; far more so than the British had been in South Africa, thirty years ago. The Germans had then contented themselves with being rude to us, and it seemed that we were to adopt a similar attitude now. War? Well, our War Minister had given what would subsequently prove to be a rather exaggerated account of our readiness, but if the French couldn't make up their minds, and if, as the Prime Minister stated, there were also internal disruption in Czecho-Slovakia, it looked as though there would still be thunder without lightning. And of course, though again there were many middle-aged firebrands, a war would prove and settle nothing. As the next Prime Minister would be saying, two years later: "There is only one thing certain about war; that it is full of disappointments and also full of mistakes." By that time, of course, he would have suffered the former and exhibited the latter, but he wasn't taking this line at the moment. He was imitating Cato, out in the political wilderness. And he had his supporters. But the present Prime Minister had more.

No war, then; or not yet. Just a lot of talk; a lot of anger, and annoyance, and several offensive gestures on all sides. Goodwill was virtually non-existent. Any onlooker should have known what the German leaders were like and the spirit that had again gripped their nation. But the mighty British Commonwealth was as mysterious and unfathomable as ever. All the more dangerous, perhaps, for this very reason. But not only to others. It was being buffeted by foreigners rather than steered by its own leaders towards the brink of the volcano, and when it fell or dived or was pushed into it, of

course it would again stand a lot of punishment and be remarkably stubborn and tough. And yet—and yet think of that victory in 1918, and of what it had led to now. If this had produced Hitler, wouldn't a second victory produce super-Hitler; and so on for ever—though perhaps we shouldn't always rely on the victories—until somebody broke the vicious circle; which at present only seemed possible by the rise of an utterly new race?

The people, everywhere, should of course have been dealing with their own leaders; not letting them imperil the whole of civilization again. But they weren't; for they were patriotic. And whatever patriotism may imply in peace-time, there is again only one meaning that Governments attach to it in a pre-war crisis or a war. And this meaning is that whatever they do is right. Or, in other words, that might is right. Which is what they all say they are fighting. Which is why I don't like them or trust them. Which is why, among other reasons, I am writing this book.

Where's my constructive anarchy, then? Well, I've told you; but I'll tell you again, if you like. You will find it all in the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. And even in Germany, I believe, one is still allowed to read that.

But again it was either not being read, or being treated, even by the Churches, as something so old-fashioned and hackneyed as to be useless to anyone now. Prayers were certainly being offered for peace, and even for guidance, but they were being offered to a god that takes sides between nations, and that god isn't God. Perhaps you think I sound unspeakably smug and self-righteous, or hypocritical because I have just admitted that I don't naturally love Governments that persecute me. Well, I don't. And I'm not a Prophet, and I'm not a Saint. Yet temporarily I'm an individual, entitled to his own thoughts; and if anyone thinks that this world has been well managed by the present management, then I beg to differ as profoundly as I can. For it is my view that human intelligence has reached, if it hasn't passed, its peak. But that there is still a very great deal that can be done with the human heart. Now we go on with the story.

I was walking across Kensington Gardens, from south to north; but of course that little hill in the Broad Walk was no longer, as it had once been, a mountain. I could remember when I prepared to

climb it by hanging on to the railings at the side, and when I could never descend it without running—and frequently fell flat on my face at the bottom. I could remember a still earlier phase when I had negotiated it in a perambulator. And of course I could remember when I had stalked up or down it on walks with J. M. B. Now—but I could hardly believe it—I was on my way to his old house, which I hadn't entered, though I had passed it and gazed at it often enough, for more than thirty years. For it belonged to Lord Kennet now, and Lady Kennet, who had been Lady Scott once, had asked me there to tea; still and always in connection with the biography. It was the strangest feeling to re-enter that little front garden, to ring the bell, and to be admitted, for a moment, into the past. There seemed, indeed, to be surprisingly little change in the drawing-room itself; though the view from the windows had altered, for Barrie's old stable-study at the end of the garden had given place to a bigger building that was Lady Kennet's studio. She was as kind to me as everyone else had been; answering all my pertinent or impertinent questions, and presently lending me a further batch of letters. Presently, also, her grown-up son and her husband came in, and she explained who I was, and they both looked at me—as if they knew what I had let myself in for. And then I left, and was crossing the Gardens again. A bit bewildered, a bit haunted, and wondering how far these feelings had made themselves clear. Extraordinary, how houses could go on standing, how history passed through them; how the Kennets could feel, with a good deal of justification, that this house was their own; but how for me there had been moments when they had all seemed transparent, or trespassers from a distant future, because my memories were so much stronger than what I could see. I glanced back, and for one instant the little house was still white, as it had been at the beginning of the century. Then the tree-trunks and the traffic hid it, and the past was back in the past. It was March 20th, 1939, now, and in a few minutes I had left the Gardens and was buying an evening paper—with news of a Note from the United States to Germany, refusing to "recognise" its recent action, and something about a Russian proposal for a conference of peace-loving Powers. But that lack of recognition had no effect, neither had the Russian proposal; and almost the next time that I passed that little house, it would be empty, and there would be boards instead of glass in its windows.

Two days later the Germans took over Memel. On March 24th the rest of my family paid a farewell visit, still in the directors' train, to the Grand National. On March 26th Signor Mussolini made a speech in which he stated, accurately enough, that a long period of peace was necessary for safeguarding the development of European civilization. And on March 28th Mary had another birthday, and we all went to see Jack Hulbert and Cicely Courtneidge in *Under Your Hat*. While on the next evening I dined with Elizabeth Lucas again, and Madrid having now surrendered, it was generally considered that the war in Spain was at an end.

Yet in spite of Mussolini, in spite of our family outings, and in spite of the conclusion of that ghastly Spanish rehearsal, there was no feeling of either security or settlement. The Germans were still at it, with a fresh objective now, and on the last day of the month the Prime Minister told the Commons, and the rest of us were then informed, that Great Britain and France had given a guarantee to Poland. The Poles, we were all told, were delighted; but again there had been no Poland, except as a geographical term, in the days of my childhood, and again this had seemed to be no disadvantage to anybody else. For a hundred years, in fact, it merely existed as a more or less romantic memory, and though it had produced Chopin and Paderewski, and had provided the background for *The Bells*, this was all that it meant to most Englishmen, and it didn't mean much more now. But at Versailles its independence had been recognized, principally, of course, so as to annoy the Germans, Austrians, and Russians, and now there were a hundred and fifty thousand square miles of it, and it was a military dictatorship, and apparently we were still on its side.

I'm afraid it struck me that that guarantee, however unavoidable in the present circumstances, was both provocative and impractical. Well, look at the map again. That Corridor had been asking for trouble from the beginning. A whole province of Germany was completely cut off by it, and it was quite obvious that neither nationalism nor patriotism, from the moment that they felt strong enough, was going to put up with that. But we'd gone and guaranteed it. And we hadn't guaranteed it in conjunction with either the Germans or the Russians, which if it had been possible might have had some effect. We'd gone and guaranteed it with the French.

That meant that if the Germans moved again, we were pledged to



war in the west. That the only method of implementing the guarantee to a country that was this time four hundred and fifty miles from the nearest French frontier was to resume the battles that we were supposed to have won before. They would take place, presumably, among the cemeteries and memorials that had been left there as a warning, and the sons of the men who lay in those graves would be ordered to fill still more. It didn't make sense. It was the kind of thing that bloodthirsty lunatics might plan, but if the various Governments found themselves in the position of bloodthirsty lunatics now, this didn't make sense, either, and it never would. Germany was on the war-path because the British and French Governments had let her get on the war-path, which seemed a good enough reason why the members of both should be impeached. But of course there was no real link with Poland—though already one mustn't say so—and of course that guarantee had again only been intended to annoy. It was followed up by the arrival in London of someone called Colonel Beck, whom we were all now invited to praise and admire—though we shouldn't be hearing much of him in another five months. And the Press said how wonderful all the Poles were, and what a mighty army they had, and what a mess it could make of the Germans. And nobody who knew anything at all believed this; but it seems now that the men on both sides of Downing Street could only deal with hopes and symbols, and could only believe what they themselves said three times or more.

Hadn't they got a map, then? Hadn't they even got a sixpenny atlas from Woolworth's? You would have thought so; but there was no sign of it. They were the victims of thoughtless complacency—which would be one of their favourite charges against their own people later on. They were also undoubtedly spreading alarm and despondency. Furthermore, the careless talk in which they were now indulging was going to cost an awful lot of lives.

But there they were. Sometimes they paused on a door-step to be photographed; and if they smiled, we were supposed to think that the situation was better, while if they looked serious we were supposed to admire them for the burden that they were supporting. But they had brought it entirely on themselves; and now they were going to bring it on us. Again we should be told that a war would last for three years or more—and simultaneously that it would be over by Christmas. Again the truth must be hidden, because it

might help "the enemy." Again there would be an appalling dislocation of everything, and shortages, and queues, and a vast muddle, and a vast outbreak of jacks-in-offices, and a vast enlargement of the Civil Service, and quantities of contradictory adjurations to the customers, and hideous waste of public money, and official fury with anyone who asked for our war-aims, and official sneers at the very mention of peace—which was a word that the Press would again only print in inverted commas, as they had done in the last war, in case even their readers should forget to sneer at it, too. For as soon as this next war started, only hatred would be allowed. And as soon as it started, every nation would be fighting to avenge the things that wouldn't have happened if it hadn't started. And all the Governments would be impulsive opportunists, though at the same time publicly crediting each other with far more diabolical foresight than any of them could conceivably possess. And so it would go on, with more and more nations being pushed into the bonfire, and less and less memory of how it all began, until eventually the disease would work itself out in a phase of light-headed exhaustion, the Governments would again show the taxpayers how careful they really were by scrapping all plans for the better world that they had promised, and we should all be back—though on a still lower level—in the era of strikes and unemployment and brother-can-you-spare-a-dime, which would lead in due course to another great war. I knew it all, because I had seen it happen; and the same kind of brains were still in charge. I couldn't stop it, but I could have prophesied with very considerable accuracy now, if anyone had cared to listen to me. For the only change was that now even the Government spoke openly of the futility of war; but as they were still determined to have one, what difference did that make?

Again there must be murder, and devastation, and ruin, and misery, all in the name of the very loftiest principles. Again liberty and happiness would be destroyed in the names of hope and freedom. Again we should be told how our adversaries really hated their rulers, and a little later on that they didn't, though it was quite obvious that however much we disliked our own we could do nothing whatever about it. Again each side would say the same things, or do the same things, while expressing horror and contempt for everything that was said and done by the other. Again

there would be shrieks of outraged astonishment at the enemy's methods of trying to starve us, though of course we should be doing our best to starve him, too. And again we should all be told that this was a battle of Good against Evil, as though the mere magnitude of the crime against humanity, for which both sides were responsible, had instantly solved all ethical problems, and had divided the world into nothing but black and white.

And again, unfortunately, my own country wouldn't be ready, because it never was. It would be ready enough, that is to say, to turn a blind eye on Ireland—if the Irish let it—while it attempted to regulate the conduct of Germans and Italians; and while they did the same thing to us. But I couldn't help wishing, if it could no longer keep the peace, that it would either back its threats by a little more force or else choose an enemy that was easier to beat. In the nineteenth century it had always done this, and it had also kept its wars at a decent distance from home. But 1914-18 seemed to have gone to its head. It had scraped through by a miracle then, but that wasn't apparently enough for it. It must now go out of its way to increase the odds against itself, as though swayed by some perverted sense of sportsmanship, and though surely it must have heard of bombs and aeroplanes, it still didn't seem to realize what they meant. In the end it would probably have an awful lot itself—and the larger they got, the more it would pretend that its enemies weren't making them larger, too; but why, if it had got to get into this mess, couldn't it have an awful lot at the beginning? Well, it was a confoundedly puzzling sort of country. One could at least say that for it.

And I was as inseparably attached to it as my soul was at present attached to my body, even though both attachments were the result of pure chance. So that I, too, must suffer and pay, for I should be something called a traitor if I didn't. But I still didn't want another war, and I knew that I wasn't going to enjoy it; for I hadn't forgotten a single aspect of the last one, and this was going to be much, much worse. Nothing to be done, though. The rulers wanted it, or were too proud to back out of it now. And some of *them* were going to enjoy it, as they used their power to protect their own persons, and still urged on their victims from behind. And the American newspaper-correspondents were going to enjoy it; like hell, they were, as they, too, kept egging us all on, and lecturing us at the same time. But nobody else was going to enjoy it. And nobody else wanted it.

Yet we'd all got to go through with it now; because less than half a dozen rulers were either fools or knaves.

As they always are, of course, and always have been, when they don't happen to be both at once. And so are the rest of us? Certainly. By all means. But blessed are the humble, for they don't and can't start wars. Their knavery and their folly are their own troubles. But the men whom they allowed to climb over them in 1939, and who then ordered them to begin murdering each other—yes, and even forced the women into it, too—were responsible for a good deal more than that. Watch them. If they don't die of old age first, you'll see them bungling a Peace presently. I couldn't possibly tell you which nations they will regard as their friends then and which as their enemies, and at present they don't know themselves. But, bless you, a little thing like that doesn't worry them, for there isn't the faintest chance of their becoming humble, too.

On April 1st Anne and I, and the dogs, went down to Rookington, where Diana followed us a few days later, and Mary about a week after that. For though there were no schools now, we still seemed to be going through the formality of an Easter holiday, and I even took a few days off myself. The position was that I had now brought the biography to the end of 1904, which I imagined was about half-way. But that the mass of material had made me run well over the original schedule, and I had actually written 150,000 words. If I went on at this rate, I should find myself offering Peter nearly three times what he had been expecting. So I thought I had better stop and cut, and revise, and get my pages into typescript, so that he could see what I had done, and then tell me whether I were to go back or go on. I felt, therefore, that I was entitled to those few days, for the purpose of re-focusing my eyesight, as it were, before I began the revision. In a sense I was half-way up the precipice, and part of me must try and stay there, while part went down to the foot. I must be a bit schizophrenic during the next six weeks or so, and Peter must regard himself as the purchaser of a pig in a poke until then. But Diana, of course, was all for my knocking off. So I did knock off, and it was rather pleasant. Or would have been, if a third part of me hadn't been so desperately worried by the state of the world.

On Good Friday, for instance, the Italians invaded Albania, and

its Queen, who had given just birth to a baby, was the first of the Royal refugees. Though I was no authority on her country, I thought this pretty disgusting. And though Good Friday is less of an actual anniversary than a movable and symbolic date, I couldn't feel that it was at all appropriate to the occasion. But though the Press fulminated for a bit, the Government didn't seem to regard it as a *casus belli*, and contented themselves with dispatching a "strong protest" to Rome. No, they said, a few days later, they wouldn't denounce the Anglo-Italian Agreement, as this would add to international tension. That was quite true. It was also quite true that the Agreement was now absolutely worthless, whatever its value before. But it was realism, I supposed, not to go to war with Italy while still drifting towards war with Germany, and again it seemed possible that they knew more than I did—though if so, they weren't going to tell it me—and I appreciated another reprieve. Reason still suggested that small countries were perhaps even more of a nuisance than big ones, though we should be better off without either. But of course it wasn't reason that had prompted Mussolini, who was just a bandit. Nor could one exactly call it reason, except in the lowest sense, that had made His Majesty's Government dispatch a strong protest with one hand and uphold that Agreement with the other. It was just another, quite useless contribution to the general muddle and mess.

So I started work again, after two days in bed with a cold. And President Roosevelt sent some peace-proposals to the two dictators, which the British Government "cordially approved," but which led to nothing but some more dialectical evasions and lightly-veiled insults. One hoped; one couldn't believe that there was so little goodwill; and then one must try to begin hoping on a lower level again. We waited for the Budget once more—that annual surprise attack on stability—and it might have been worse; and no doubt should have been worse; and anyhow would be worse in a few more months. Hope flickered. But hope had been bluffed. For on the following day the Prime Minister announced the reintroduction of conscription, though again he called it something else. Hope sank—except for those who believed that this feeble threat was still in time, or that it was good for young men to be taught how to kill each other in any case. But of course the Bill would be passed.

A couple of days later Herr Hitler denounced the Anglo-German

Naval Agreement of 1935, but the Press here seemed to think this was rather a good thing. We were told that it had tied our hands, though we hadn't been told so four years ago. Nor was the spirit in which it was denounced exactly a spirit of friendship.

On the day after that the Foreign Secretary, rather belatedly putting the horse behind the cart, started talking to the Soviet Ambassador in London about an Anglo-Soviet Agreement. But of course we weren't told what they said; and it would be more than two years before—thanks to Herr Hitler again—there was any kind of result.

And on the day after that Staff talks began between the Germans and Italians in Rome; and we all left Rooklington, and made our way back to Chelsea.

It was May now, Anne's dances were beginning in real earnest—if that is the right expression—and I must say that I still admire the hostesses who showed so much pluck and determination as their world went on crumbling away. I don't look on them as contributory causes to the approaching collapse, or as characters who were merely hiring bandmen to fiddle while civilization burned. They knew, as we all knew, that the war would be here in a few months at the latest, but they wanted their daughters to have fun while they could; they wanted them at least to have some memories of gaiety; and so they went on with their expensive or, if you like to call it so, their extravagant task. The daughters and the young men knew what they were in for, too. They had all been born at a time when another great war had seemed impossible, but now they were grown-up, or nearly grown-up, and their elders had let it come back. In the summer Season of 1914, when I had done some dancing myself, we were hardly thinking of the future, and, indeed, when the war came that time, it took us nearly all by surprise. But now it was different. The threat was clear enough to this younger generation, and most of them were disillusioned already. They didn't dislike the enemies who had been selected, though they were all going to be loyal and courageous when they were put to the test. But they were quite frank in their contempt for all statesmen, and they saw no glamour in what had now got to be done. They didn't tell me this, for they were too polite. Nor did they look at me as though it were all my fault, which they might very well have done. They were just seriously and a little desperately deter-



*Photo Cannons of Hollywood*

ANNE, 1939





mined to dance while this kind of dancing was still allowed; without hysteria, but with a kind of fatalism that was a reproach to every leader or ruler on earth. And they told my daughters, with a laugh here and there, how very completely they considered themselves to have been swindled and cheated. And sometimes my daughters told me.

I might say, therefore, that it was shame that kept me away from the dances—if I hadn't already confessed that they exhausted and bored me, anyhow. Yet it was shame that I felt whenever I saw these young creatures, whose lives and futures were to be wrecked and sacrificed so soon. For I remembered how I had blamed my own elders, twenty-five years ago, and how unanswerable my thoughts had seemed. Yet here was the beginning of another ghastly and pointless tragedy, and now I was an elder myself; and I had done nothing whatever to prevent it, because there had never been anything that I could do. So that I was deeply abased. I thought how unjust I had been to my parents' contemporaries, or at any rate to all of them who had been in the position where I now found myself; but I also felt hideously and hopelessly responsible towards my children and their friends. For this time everyone had seen it coming, and this time everyone knew that it was going to be worse. But memories and lessons had been quite useless. There was no dodging patriotism, it seemed, and there could be no escape for the victims that it always claimed.

I didn't hate war because I knew it was going to ruin me, or even because I had the sense to dislike being bombed. I hated it because it was wrong. I hated it because it was unjust and unfair. And because it was stupid and vicious. And because it made use of the best qualities of mankind for the vilest purposes. And because it lived and thrived on lies. And because it never ended, even after the conventional number of years, but went on bringing misery and agony to everyone, as long as its survivors were left. Yes, we should all be punished again, the innocent and the guilty alike. But there would be far less punishment for the guilty, for this was one of its laws.

The guilty were in the saddle, though, and the innocent must be trodden underfoot. The innocent were dancing now, but the guilty were preparing their destruction. Such noble words would be spoken, such scorn poured on the high-sounding words of others.

The truth would be smothered as these phrases met and clashed. For the truth was that all human beings were members of one body, whose only real enemies were greed, and pride, and prestige. The truth was that evil can never cast out evil. But the guilty had forgotten this, or were afraid of it. They thought—idiots that they were—that something called a victory would put everything right. They had learnt nothing. They were blind and deaf, but unfortunately they weren't dumb. So there they were, and we couldn't get rid of them; for whether they were satisfied with the present position or not, they all far preferred it to any system that would have resulted in their own return to the level where they really belonged. And that's the truth, whatever they say, or however successfully they deceived themselves and others. They weren't fit for the job. But the hostesses were extraordinarily competent and efficient, and kind-hearted as well. So Anne went on dancing. And I could hardly look her or her friends in the face.

On May 5th the now somewhat fabulous Colonel Beck refused to hand over Danzig to the Germans (though they had owned it, until 1919, for a hundred and twenty-six years) or to grant them a route through the Corridor. He wouldn't have done this, of course, if the British hadn't backed him up. And perhaps the British wouldn't have backed him up if they had known a little more about the French. But it didn't make war less probable; in fact, it made it inevitable, as his unhappy countrymen would soon find out. The British would then be quite unable to help them, even though some of them would very kindly help the British. But of course the truth was that the British, or their Government, were now trying to dig their toes in on a slippery slope, and were much more concerned with annoying the Germans than with assisting the Poles. For if the Poles had been left alone, they could have negotiated and given way. But the Poles, though they, too, had nibbled at Czecho-Slovakia, must pay for Munich now and for the alleged loss of British prestige. And if they had given way, it would have been a score for Hitler—not that he wasn't going to score anyhow, and in a much more horrible fashion—and it now seemed to be established that whether he were right or wrong, this mustn't be allowed. As a matter of fact, he was both; and so were we. And so were the Poles, if it comes to that. But the Devil was running the world now, and this was just the situation that he liked.

For, of course, if anyone had been utterly in the wrong, even the Devil would have had a job to start the war.

On the next day Diana went down for the first of her week-end visits to her father at Hillside, for he was now just well enough to have been moved there. And on the Sunday, which was May 7th, having first dealt with the remarkable episode of the stolen car which the thief had chosen to abandon outside my front door—and in consequence of which I nearly missed the train—I went down for the day (and a very fine day it was) to see Mr. and Mrs. Sydney Blow at their house in the neighbourhood of Henley. For Mrs. Blow was otherwise known as Miss Hilda Trevelyan. And Miss Hilda Trevelyan was the first Wendy in *Peter Pan*, and the first Maggie Wylie in *What Every Woman Knows*. And I had known her in both incarnations, so that I wasn't surprised to find her as kind, as level-headed, and as attractive as ever, and she gave me a lot of information, as well as a very good lunch and tea.

Back by train again, but Diana was still away, and my daughters were both out. So, naturally, I took the Pekes round the block, though naturally, as it was still so fine and hot, they both rather lagged. "Come on, Topsy!" I said again. And again I looked at her; and suddenly I picked her up.

"Are you all right?" I asked.

She couldn't answer, of course, but as I held her a little closer, she again licked my ear. I put her down again. She stared at me mistily, and resumed her pitifully stately walk.

"Wait, Victoria!" I said. "We mustn't hurry her."

So we didn't; and presently she was hopping up the door-steps almost as briskly as ever. But I was worried. And when Diana came back, she confessed at once that she was worried, too. Our beloved head dog seemed suddenly so much older. She seemed both restless and tired. But she was still eating, she still *wanted* to come out, and there was no symptom that we could actually name as yet—except age, and that growing opalescence in her glorious eyes. Poor little Topsy. Should we send for the vet, or would it be kinder not to tease her? We decided just to go on watching her, and caring for her, and hoping that she might pick up. But she would be twelve in less than two months now, and there could be no cure for that. We must just go on loving her—which was easy enough—and protecting her, when we could, from Victoria's playful assaults. Or if

she paused at the foot of the stairs, then of course we would carry her up. And sometimes she seemed better. And then she was a little worse. But never—never for one instant—was she irritable, or anything but affectionate and gentle. She was still Topsy; the sweetest dog in the world.

I had another helpful conference with Mason. And another with Irene Vanbrugh. The Prime Minister warned the Germans that if they attempted to change the Danzig situation by force, it would start a conflagration in which Britain would be involved. Quite true; though he wasn't using the word "conflagration" in its literal sense. But as the Poles had now been encouraged to hang on to Danzig until it was wrested away from them, the Germans must either use force or climb down. And nobody expected them to climb down, because it wasn't their habit—nor ours, either—so that everything was now fixed for the conflagration to begin. To do the Prime Minister justice, it was undoubtedly the House of Commons that was pushing him towards the brink now. To do the electors justice, they had never been asked to vote on this issue, and were still only vaguely apprised of the facts of the case. To do the German nation justice, it hadn't been told the truth, either, and had last had an opportunity of voting on anything—in a manner which could possibly be described as voting—more than six years ago. To do the Polish people justice, they also, were distinctly short of accurate information, while their Constitution had been virtually suspended for more than four years. The French, as usual, were bogged by avarice and corruption, but probably couldn't have spoken with a single voice even if they had been given the chance. The Italians had been unable to express any opinion of their own since 1922. A nice set-up all round, as plans for mobilization went forward, and as the common people of every country were stampeded towards the shambles. For the men at the top were the only men who counted, and they were all as stubborn as mules. "Freedom," they shouted, or "Self-Determination," or "Living-Space," or "Invaders, Beware!" But all these words had only one meaning, in the absence of all goodwill. They meant, for instance, that only a few yards from our house in Chelsea a little girl would be buried alive, in the wreckage of her dead parents' home, for five days and nights.

Suddenly, I received an unexpected appeal for help. My venerable Club had now developed a Ladies' Annexe, and the custom had

arisen of holding what were known as "Mixed Talks" there, at which a speaker introduced some subject that was informally debated, while another member took the Chair. I am afraid that I had avoided these evenings quite automatically, as I am a reader—when not a writer—and have never really wanted to hear anyone speak. But now it appeared that Humbert Wolfe, who was to have been Chairman on May 15th, was required in his other capacity, as an important official at the Ministry of Labour, to be present in the background at the House of Commons while the Conscription Bill was introduced. So the Secretary asked if I would take his place, and he asked so abruptly and persuasively that I accepted before I quite knew what I had done.

Or perhaps it was Diana who made me accept. At any rate we both turned up at the aforesaid Annexe, and I was very nervous because I had got to make a speech, but the Secretary thanked me so warmly that I also felt a faint glow of conceit. He then handed me a small wooden hammer or gavel, and it was this (if you see what I mean) that went to my head. I realized that whenever I banged it on the table, everyone would have to stop talking and listen to me; and as people don't listen to me as a general rule, this was rather bad for my psyche.

I saw a clergyman. I thought: "Let's make him say Grace." I put the suggestion to him, and he accepted with alacrity. Bang! went my gavel. There was complete silence as I repeated my request; and from that moment, I am afraid—and though no one could have looked more pious during the clergyman's brief blessing—my one desire was to thump the table again. So I did, both when it was necessary and unnecessary; and always with such pleasure that of course I ought to be kinder about prime ministers, for suddenly I knew what it was like to be a prime minister myself. Diana said afterwards that I overdid it ridiculously, but I couldn't resist it, for there's nothing like tyranny when one happens to be a tyrant—and in any case I was soon brought low. For presently I had to make my real speech, which was sheer agony, and then it was one of the cares of my office to make others speak whether they wished to or not. The debate was on "Modern Fiction," and I don't know that I have ever heard a distinguished gathering talk quite so much irrelevant tosh. The gunpowder, in fact, was now running out of the heels of my boots; I didn't want to be a tyrant any longer;

I only wanted to go home. Even the gavel was no comfort to me now. Its magic had left it, and again—though hideously conspicuous—I knew that I was one of the mob. Quite a lesson, in this queer incident, for anyone tempted by pride. I suppose the real tyrants never reach the phase that came to me so swiftly. The gavel, or its equivalent, is always for them a symbol of real might; it never occurs to them what asses they are, and they're unable to put it down. So that again I was conscious of a gulf as the evening ended; though Diana naturally told me that I had made a marvellous speech.

Then she must go off to Hillside again; and as I had at last finished typing the first half of the biography, I gave it to Peter, and awaited results. He read it quickly. It seemed that he approved it. Of course, he said, it was far longer than he had meant, but he could suggest no cuts, and he would be obliged, in fact, if I would now complete my labours on the same scale.

I was flattered. Actually, I had made rather a fool of myself again, for I couldn't hope to get back to my own branch of modern fiction for at least another year, and I had been away from it for a year already. In other words, and in spite of Peter's generous terms, I was begging myself and my family, and a sensible author would have finished the whole thing. But I couldn't. I wasn't entirely inexperienced at my craft, but none of us had realized what a lot Barrie had done, and it was even a relief to me to learn that I could go on at my own pace. Diana supported me, of course, and would have done so if I had told her that I was going to take another ten years. But there was a war coming. The longer I kept out of my old market, the more I should be losing my old public, too. Hell, I thought. But I couldn't alter the treatment now. I'd just got to go on.

I must also get the other literary executor's approval, if I could, and she was going to be more critical than Peter. So that for a while I couldn't go on, because I had to satisfy her first. If I could have looked into the future, I should also have seen that when the final word was at last written, Peter and Nico would both have gone into the Army, and the paper shortage would be so acute that my immediate task would be to start cutting the text after all. I should be another three months on that, and the book wouldn't eventually be published until April, 1941. But I was spared this precise know-

ledge in May, 1939, and Peter had flattered me, and his more critical colleague had certainly flattered me, too. Was I writing a good book, then? I didn't know. I hoped so. I had taken a great deal of trouble, and was doomed and condemned to take a great deal more—indeed I was, when I had to go on concentrating in war-time—but how can a coral insect see its own reef? I believed in work, and I was working. And my publisher and my conscience and my wife had all told me to go on. It was the cloud over Europe, not my own lack of business acumen, which was turning everything into torment. My book had become a trust now that I couldn't desert, and we still weren't entirely broke. But as I glanced out of the schoolroom window, I was always seeing a vision of destruction—which would presently be more than fulfilled. And I can't say that that was any help, either.

On the night of May 17th Anne completed her official *début* by attending the Queen Charlotte's Ball. On May 19th there was another dance-dinner, which I escaped, and was entertained by little Dorothy and Douglas. On May 20th there were some riots and some shooting in Danzig. On May 22nd the German-Italian political and military pact was signed in Berlin. On May 24th the Prime Minister announced, more hopefully than truthfully, that full agreement between Britain, France, and Russia would be reached at an early date. And on Thursday, May 25th, we began setting off for Whitsun at Rooklington; with Diana again visiting Hillside first, though she was worn out, and it wasn't exactly on the way.

Anne had a friend to stay, the weather was glorious, and I didn't stop working even on Bank Holiday. In fact I had even taken on another rather odd commission, which was to write a booklet in praise of Hove. At first I had been indignant, then I had found that E. V. Lucas had already done the same thing, and then—when I started looking into the matter—I had discovered that even Hove had virtues which I could sincerely praise. Naturally I wanted the money—and they were gentlemen, and paid me, though the booklet was yet another victim of the war—but there was this to be said for Hove: that its boundaries were fixed, that it wasn't proposing to sprawl over the downs, and that it was very efficiently run. It was plain, if you like. But it was clean, neat, tidy, and civilized. Its Park had no railings—which was unusual then. Its lawns were a justifiable source of pride. It was on the point of opening an

immense, all-the-year-round swimming-bath, which I saw, and described; but the Government took it over before anyone could swim in it. And it had no slums.

It may be that this was because other and less fortunate towns had far too many. But in any case I enjoyed my conducted visit of inspection, which included an enormous lunch, and on again examining my conscience, and consulting Diana, saw no reason for being prouder than E. V. L. But this was the last interruption to J. M. B.

Anne went up for several dances during the ten days to which we extended this little break, but we were all at Rooklington for my birthday; on which the first militiamen (as they were still called) registered, but which Diana and I celebrated by dining out at the Newhaven Harbour hotel. Very old-fashioned, to look at, but a fascinating situation—with steamers and yachts on one side of it, and trains on the other—and admirable native food. It had been our great place for special, Rooklington treats, for quite a while now; after dinner we always stared at the night-boat, waiting to set off for Dieppe; and Diana always wished that she were going in it, and I didn't. So we stared again, and all was peaceful still. Yet one felt something, for harbours are always sensitive to the threat of war. How much longer, I wondered, before it's all barbed wire and sand-bags here, and the ships are hospital-ships, and the hotel is commandeered and closed? It would be exactly three months.

Back to our home, and again we didn't say what we were thinking. Was Topsy all right? Yes, there she was, waving her tail at us. But suddenly she gave that little cough again. It had started a short time ago, and of course dogs cough sometimes; but when they cough too often, and it goes on like this, something has to be done. And she wasn't well in other ways. There was the breathlessness, and the obvious fatigue. Even a layman could tell that her heart was labouring. We would ring up the Lewes vet.

He came over. His bedside manner—not that Topsy was actually in bed—was always delightful, and she seemed pleased to see him. He examined her. His view, at this stage, was that she was suffering from no more than a little mild bronchial trouble, and he prescribed a cough mixture which we induced her to take. Even at forty-seven I had a feeling that as soon as a doctor produced a bottle of medicine, a patient's condition must improve. We were back in London now. I insisted to myself that Topsy was better, and



perhaps, for a while, she did cough a little less. Or perhaps it was only that I was getting more used to it.

Fine weather, still. Always it seemed that there must be fine weather when wars were brewing. But Topsy, who knew nothing of such wickedness and folly, and had hardly ever seemed to mind the heat before, was now almost always restless in her basket. She moved to a chair. She moved to the sofa. She was down on the floor again, and again she was sitting just inside the door.

"Do you want to go out, Topsy?"

She knew what we meant, but there was no acknowledgment. One of us would open the drawing-room door for her, but having glanced outside it, she merely blinked at us, with the familiar air of patient benevolence, and stayed just where she was. The truth was—though we didn't know it yet—that already she was beginning to feel uncomfortable whenever she lay down. She sat up; and sometimes tried to sleep sitting up. And then she sat by the door, I think, because always she hoped that there would be some kind of relief on the other side. But as we opened it, she again knew that she was mistaken. It wasn't this room, or us, that she wanted to leave. She was looking for escape from her pain.

We sent for Mr. Batt now, who had been Diana's vet for nearly twenty-five years, who had known all our dogs, and was our trusted friend as well. Again poor Topsy was gently examined, while I waited with Victoria in another room. And then Diana came out, and told me what he had said. Her heart was bad, and he had prescribed for this—so that now she must have some little pills with her food. But it was her lungs that were the real trouble. Reluctantly, he had dismissed the suggestion of any ordinary illness, for it was something worse than that. An incurable condition which he knew only too well. It might increase rapidly, or it might be like this for months. But there was nothing that anyone could do for it. Except, of course, what nobody mentioned yet.

For Mr. Batt will always fight for his patients as long as he can. In the end, I suppose, he must have granted euthanasia to hundreds if not thousands of them; but he hates doing this, for he still loves animals, and has never learnt to treat them as anything but the sensitive individuals that they are. So that Diana and I must still decide—though this was almost impossible—how long the rest of our little dog's life must last. Whatever we decided—or whatever Diana

decided, for, as usual, it was all falling on her—we knew that we should be almost bound to regret. When the word had been spoken, we should feel like murderers. When the deed had been done, we should never know if we had chosen too soon or too late. If only our poor little Topsy could have died, gently and swiftly, in her sleep. But she was brave, and she was patient; and I, at any rate, was a coward. So nothing was settled, except that Mr. Batt would go on visiting her; and that every hour and minute that decision must still be faced. And there were days when she did seem better, though I think now that she was being punished for her courage. We hoped—though I suspect that it was I who, from selfishness, did the most hoping. And still Diana was exhausted by the long months of anxiety over her father, and by the late nights with Anne, and by the cloud that was gathering over us all. And still I was constantly worried about my work, as well as by everything else; and trying to treat it as an anodyne, put in more and more hours up in the schoolroom, and emerged in a further cloud of my own.

On June 14th little Dorothy had her annual lunch with me; a little earlier this year; because nobody knew what was going to happen next. She was appearing now in a play about the last war—part of which I had seen, for her sake; but not all, because I couldn't bear it—and some of our talk, I remember, was about Douglas's plans for the next. He wanted to fly, because he could fly already; and perhaps I need hardly tell you that in these circumstances only a series of heroic struggles with dim-witted authority eventually got him into the air at all. So I admired him. But I had never meant him to do anything of the sort, when I made that speech at his wedding. However, with a good deal of internal effort and agony, I again succeeded in making little Dorothy laugh. Then we separated, and I was still overwhelmingly oppressed.

The next day—June 15th—was the twenty-second anniversary of my own wedding-day, so Diana and I must do something, and with a further effort we did. We dined together at the Café Royal, and then we went on to see *H.M.S. Pinafore* at Sadlers Wells. This was my own choice, and I imagine that it was also an attempt to escape into the past; for it was the first play that I had ever been taken to, almost exactly forty years ago. To-night it was preceded by *Cox and Box*, of which I am afraid we didn't think very much. Then

there was an interval. Then the curtain rose on *Pinafore*, and, alas, it wasn't only that the orchestra was being directed far too rapidly for my memories and taste, but someone had decided to dress and mount the production in a style antedating its real period by approximately fifty years. No doubt, if there had been less oppression, I should have made no complaint. Nor did I exactly mention my feelings now; for it was our wedding-day, and it wasn't my business to belittle the treat that I had selected myself. But at the next interval we both left the stuffy theatre—as plenty of others did—and walked out into the street. It was dusk now, with a pale-green sky, and the street-lamps all shining brightly in Rosebery Avenue; and I know what I was wondering, which was how much longer they would be allowed to shine like this. Yet I didn't say this, either. It was the approach of an almost empty Number 19 omnibus that had the same and instant effect on both Diana and myself. If we boarded it, we should be home, without changing, in less than half an hour. But if we returned to the theatre, we shouldn't only be stifled and slightly bored, but should then be facing far more competition in the matter of the bus.

So we looked at each other. "Shall we?" said our eyes. I had my hat with me, and I put it on. The omnibus stopped, and we entered it. *Pinafore* must go on without us, for we hadn't the spirit to see the rest. We were too tired; we had far too great a load on our minds. We wanted to see Topsy instead.

Still no decision though. Perhaps we still hoped too much. Perhaps her courage and patience were still enemies rather than friends. The next day we drove her and Victoria down to Rooklington, for what was to be almost her last week-end there. Again she went for a few, short walks, or pottered slowly round the garden. But still there was the infinitely pathetic and tragic little cough. And still we were always finding her sitting up by this other drawing-room door.

Back to London on the Monday. On the Wednesday evening I was George Hughes's guest at a banquet given by his City Company; and it was indeed a banquet, though we were all conscious of the cloud. I was even given a box of chocolates for Diana, in the old tradition that would so soon be coming to an end. But I couldn't give it her until the morning, for again she and Anne were out at another dance.

"You know you're worn out," I was always saying, now. "Can't you possibly have a bit of a rest?"

But she couldn't or wouldn't, because of all her duties. All she could do was to go down to Rooklington again, for another three nights, with the dogs and daughters as well. I stayed behind, working, this time. On the Monday—June 26th—they all returned, and Topsy, who had now had her last little visit there, was reported to be no worse. But no better, either. And Diana was still looking dreadfully tired.

That evening, while Anne went to another dance, her parents went to a dinner-party; which was the last time but one that I put on my white tie and tails. I should be wearing them just once more, a fortnight later, when I, too, turned out to see Anne dancing—and had the horrors, because I could smell the summer of 1914 all over again. But to-night I dined in them; and a member of the Government was present, and he told us (though I knew it already) that war was as good as certain now. But he didn't seem disturbed by it, and I'll swear he didn't apologize. Later—and also to my horror—I found that we were all going on to the Savoy. I watched that member of the Government prancing round on the celebrated rising floor. And I thought my thoughts. But I just couldn't understand how he could prance like that in a place like this, with blood, as it seemed to me, all over his hands. Why wasn't he weeping and howling? Why wasn't he in sackcloth and ashes? How could he *dare* to laugh and pirouette?

"Don't look like that," said Diana. "You *must* look as if you were enjoying yourself."

"Let's go home," I said.

"We can't," said Diana. "We mustn't be so rude."

So we stayed for a bit, or until it wasn't quite so rude, and then we managed to slip away.

"Do you realize," I was asking Diana, "that——"

I changed my mind.

"Do you realize," I substituted, "that I came on to the Savoy with two of the richest men at that dinner, and that they left me to pay for the taxi?"

"Oh, darling," said Diana; "you know that always happens."

And of course she was quite right again.

I think, however, that it was belated and sensible economy, rather than manners, which now suddenly caused me to resign from my mixed Club. The new subscription was due on the first of July, and I certainly postponed even this decision as long as I could. But there was a war coming, my income had dropped heavily, and though twenty-four years ago—when I had first joined it—I had thought the other members far too old and sedate, I had recently discovered that they were far too noisy and young. It was a clear sign, I thought, that our connection should now cease. So I wrote my letter of resignation, held it up for one more day and then posted it with a mixture of regret and relief. The Secretary acknowledged it without exhibiting either. And that—after twenty-four years, as I say—was the end of that.

On June 28th the British Government sent a Note to Germany, in which they denied encirclement, but reiterated their determination to resist aggression. On the next day the Foreign Secretary said the same thing in a world-wide broadcast. Aggression and encirclement, of course, are always what the other side does. Defence, however offensive, is all that a Government ever adopts itself. With notes and speeches like these—and the German authorities were being just as obstinate and unhelpful—the cleavage merely grew worse. It almost seemed now as though the men in power were so determined to have a war that they no longer much cared what it was about. They had also persuaded quite a number of their prospective victims to go about saying: "Well, anything's better than this. It will be a relief when it begins." And that, of course, was just wicked nonsense, even though it was a reaction that was almost bound to occur. Still, also, the British and German people were far more like each other than the British and the French, the British and the Poles, or the Germans and the Italians. But this, apparently, was what made hatred so easy. For there is always a temptation to dislike anybody who at all resembles oneself. One doesn't care for one's own bad qualities—which one believes that one has taken such trouble to conceal—being quite so shamelessly displayed.

And anyhow, which should have pleased our own Government, it wasn't only the jingoes who hated now. The intellectuals had again discovered hatred, as they had done twenty-five years ago, and had managed to brand the word "appeasement" as something contemptibly evil in itself. I thought (because some bits of religious educa-

tion still stuck to me) that they were wrong. I felt strongly that Governments—like fires—might be good servants but were always bad masters. It seemed fantastic and incredible that they should now be condemning thousands, and perhaps millions, of healthy human beings to death when they didn't even know what death really was. Never had there been greater need to forgive them for not knowing what they were doing. But nothing could touch their self-righteousness, and of course nothing ever would.

So when Diana went down to Hillside again, for the week-end of July 1st, she took a small, cylindrical can with her, with a perforated lid. And in it, as well as about a pint and a half of water, was our handsome and trusting Fishwick. No more should I feed him after breakfast, clean out his little tank for him—while he swam industriously round a slop-pail—or gaze in admiration at his glittering scales, and reflect what an old friend he was. For Fishwick, in that can, was the first of the evacuees. For the rest of his life—and he lived nearly another year—he would bask or disport himself in very comfortable quarters in the garden at Hillside. But I missed him dreadfully, after ten years' companionship, and he would never return to Chelsea again.

Diana, however, returned on the Monday; still worried about her father, whom she had found not quite so well; still worried, as we all were, by the dinning repetition of the word Danzig, which was on everyone's lips and on every front page. And still with a string of late nights stretching out ahead of her, because of her selfless interpretation of a mother's duty to Anne. It was still hot, but it was thundery now. I had had a very quiet week-end myself, and Topsy had been with me nearly all the time. But I couldn't pretend that she was any better. She still coughed. She still sat by the drawing-room door. Sometimes her eyes closed and her head nodded there, but she still couldn't really rest.

We went round the block, but I was making two journeys now, for Victoria could hardly be expected to loiter as slowly as that. And Topsy was still eating. It was impossible to say that she was complaining. Perhaps she had forgotten what it felt like to be young and well—and you mustn't think that she was so ill, even now, that the decision was out of our hands. A stranger who saw her might still have noticed nothing; for the cough was so very short and soft, and any dog might perhaps sit quietly there by the door.

But Diana and I had known her since the autumn of 1927. On that Sunday, while Diana had been with her parents in Gloucestershire, we both knew that Topsy's twelfth birthday had come. There was an immense store of memories for both of us; beginning with the little second-hand clothes shop in the King's Road and continuing with every adventure that had befallen us ever since then. Topsy was inseparably associated with all of them. We thought of her in Scotland, and at Nonesuch, and at Splashcliff. We thought of her in Battersea Park and on Wimbledon Common. We thought of the countless days, and evenings, and nights that she had shared with us. We thought of Rufus, and Bully. We looked back, and saw our daughters as two little girls in cotton frocks and sunbonnets; and now they were both grown-up—and Heaven alone knew what their future would be—for this was what the days, and evenings, and nights had done. But the days, and evenings, and nights hadn't really been countless. They had all been taking our poor little Peke towards the moment that had now almost arrived.

We looked at each other. We looked at Topsy again. And when Mr. Batt paid his next visit, Diana could only tell him what had got to be done. He was to pay just one more visit; on Friday, the seventh of July.

Nine years since he had come here to waft our beloved Rufus, but we hadn't forgotten a single detail of the tragic and established rites. The last morning. The last walk. The special dish of chicken, containing the special opiate that Mr. Batt had sent round. Then he returned himself, and he and Diana and Topsy went up to Diana's bedroom, while Anne and I and Victoria remained in the dining-room below. It had a very thin ceiling, supported on open beams; so often I had heard impatient little barks through it, when we were giving a more formal dinner-party, and it wasn't yet time for the dogs to come down. And of course it was impossible not to listen now.

I heard footsteps. And then, because although Topsy was drowsy she had still not fallen asleep, and because there could be no reprieve or postponement now, I heard a sharp, heart-rending squeak, as the hypodermic syringe gave her a twinge of pain. Or perhaps not. We have always hoped and prayed that that cry—yes, and the others that followed it—came from an unconscious reflex; or that she was only startled; or that still, with Diana stroking her, she forgave us and

understood. But we don't know. Any more than we have known, from that moment to this, what else could possibly have been done.

Victoria looked up at me.

"It's all right, darling," I said. "Don't worry. It's absolutely all right."

I was lying to her. I had to lie to her. I knew the loneliness that was waiting for her, and how she must puzzle and suffer, after nine years of constant companionship, as she, the youngest of all our Pekes—but her muzzle was white now—became in turn our solitary head dog. Yet what else, again, could I possibly say?

There was another, and fainter, little yelp. I glanced at Anne. It was chance that her sister was out; and chance, if it comes to that—for all her love of Topsy—that she herself was at home. I was terrified that she was going to break down. But she was seventeen and a half. She had sense as well as sensibility. Perhaps I shouldn't have been so utterly wretched myself if I hadn't been thirty years older. She said nothing, but whatever she were controlling, she appeared to be quite calm.

No more sounds from above. Just silence. We waited; and presently I heard Mr. Batt coming down, and let him out—without saying anything, either, so far as I can remember—and saw him drive away in his car. And then Diana came down.

I suppose I said something then. I suppose we both did. And that evening the Milnes were dining with us—for we could hardly put them off—and we did our best, which wasn't so bad, to hide what was in our hearts. But we weren't happy. How could we be, at the end of those twelve years of gentleness and sweetness? How could we be, when we thought of that tiny body on Diana's sofa upstairs?

It lay there all night—for though the spirit had left it, she still felt that it might be hovering near, and would be sad if it had to hover elsewhere—while Victoria slept with me. Then Mr. Batt came back, took it away with him, and presently returned with the ashes in a small, sealed jar. They are scattered now, and so are Rufus's; for the time was to come, in less than a year, when this, also, was the only thing to do.

Diana kept going for just over a week, and even got down to Hillside again. But then, immediately on her return—and no



wonder, after the four months that she had just been through—she was very ill indeed. Then, as she began to recover, I was taken fairly ill myself. And then, as we both took up our separate and joint burdens again, a few people decided that it was time to start the war.

THE END







